

The State of Governance in Private Higher Education in South Africa:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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When I attended my first research workshop years ago, I was told that research is about the journey, not the destination. And what a journey it has been. A journey intertwined with the journey of life. It has been a long, but rewarding one and it is with a slight sense of disbelief that I arrive at this pit stop. With a distinct and pressing realization that the journey is not over, I have not arrived, I'm still learning.

My research journey has been influenced by so many people, starting at my alma mater, the University of Johannesburg, studying and working with some of the finest researchers. I am most grateful for the realization that I want research to be part of my journey. Prof. Saartjie Gravett, Prof. Jos Grobbelaar and Prof. Neels Fourie, you taught me the basics of research, which I still treasure and use today. Thank you for making me believe that I can be a researcher.

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ABSTRACT

Shattock (2012) is of the view that sound governance can improve the standing and reputation of higher education institutions. However, very limited information is available about governance practices in private higher education in South Africa and it is perceived to be inconsistent, unclear, or non-existent. Currently, only 10% of the total number of students enrolled for tertiary studies are studying at private institutions (Cloete, 2014). This does not nearly exhaust the capacity of the private sector at a time when public institutions are significantly beyond capacity (Bothwell, 2018; Ramrathan, 2016). The low participation rates are ascribed to widespread concerns about academic credibility, corporate approaches, and profit-driven financial practices (DHET, 2013). There is thus a need to build trust and confidence to ensure that students consider private higher education as an attractive alternative. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of governance practices at private higher education institutions in South Africa through the shared experiences of those closest to it.

A qualitative phenomenological study, using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach is conducted to answer the main research question: *What are the experiences of practitioners involved in governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa?* Ten purposefully sampled participants contributed to the study by taking part in semi-structured interviews in order to explore their lived experiences of governance at their institutions. Document analysis was used to supplement the data gathered by means of the interviews. Data analysis was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method, as well as thematic analysis to identify patterns and formulate themes (Creswell, 2015).

Analysis of the data revealed that the private higher education sector in South Africa is dominated by corporate governance practices, with limited focus on academic governance, which impacts the quality of content, decision-making, and policy. The findings indicate that governance as a phenomenon is not well understood in the private higher education sector, and it is experienced as informal and ad hoc. In addition, document analysis revealed that well-defined governance structures are not reflected in the experiences of the participants. A lack of academic participation was particularly evident, due to the dominant focus on board-level governance. This study presents a unique insider perspective on governance in higher education and recognizes the need for innovative and radical governance approaches during uncertain times (Copland, 2014). It concludes with suggestions that aim to assist institutions to find the most suitable approach to governance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESA	Higher Education South Africa (now Universities South Africa)
LFHE	Leadership Foundation of Higher Education
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

The pace of change in higher education is accelerating (DeMillo, 2017; Lawton, 2013). Universities have traditionally been viewed as beacons of stability, knowledge generators, and community influencers. However, as with many other industries, higher education institutions are increasingly facing political, social, and economic challenges that require resilience and responsiveness (Rumbley, Helms, Peterson, & Altbach, 2014). Student profiles are increasingly diversifying as participation rates rise and government funding decreases (Golpek, 2012; Marginson, 2016; Zaman, 2015). Institutions are encouraged to embrace internationalization and to continuously reconsider the student experience (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Clark, 1998; Granados, 2015). Due to financial constraints, it is also becoming increasingly difficult for universities to stay abreast of innovative teaching technologies and to sustain high quality research output (Ernst & Young, 2017). These issues not only pose challenges to academic scholarship, but also to university managers and leaders as they aim to maintain a balance between the original purpose of universities and innovative business practices. These changes impact on institutions globally; however, there are also unique, local aspects that affect higher education in different countries.

1. The South African higher education challenge

South Africa is known as a country of potential and possibility. Growing up a proud South African, I had dreams and visions of how I would make a difference by educating people, giving them opportunities to change their own and other lives, and helping to build a wonderful nation with a better future. Beyond my own personal aspirations, education is viewed as a key driver for realizing the full potential of the country, and higher education has a particularly important mission: not only to train and develop school-leavers so that they may take advantage of increased employability options, but also to retrain the vast number of adults who had not been previously granted these opportunities.

In 2017, the population of South Africa was just over 56 million, with 56% of the total population under 25 years of age. This means that approximately six million young people are within the traditional university age bracket of 18–24 years. Young people in South Africa aspire to a bright future and employment opportunities as they grew up in the largest economy (only recently overtaken by Nigeria) on an extremely diversified African continent (Rossouw, 2016). The black African middle class is on the rise, having increased from 1.7 million people in 2008 to 4.2 million in 2012 (DHET, 2015). This expanded middle class band is putting pressure on an already resource-constrained higher education sector that was established in an unbalanced political context in which only an elite minority had the privilege of access to higher education. Demand is thus growing to create more university spaces, not only for the increasing number of young people, but also in light of the increased need to upskill working adults and professionals.

It is not surprising that the higher education (post-secondary schooling) sector is described as ‘badly neglected, fractured and historically underfunded’ (Blom, 2015, p. 3), with priorities that compete with the equally deserving primary schooling system. For the last two decades, as a student, professional, and administrator, I have been intimately exposed to a bleeding sector that is in dire need of change and stability. The authorities confirm that the state of institutions and the quality of offerings are ‘highly uneven, contradictory and complex’ (Universities South Africa, 2015, p. 4) due to a history of serving only a small, select group and the increasing need to make educational opportunities available to the majority of the population. It is clear from the statistics that the number of students eligible for university entry increased by more than 60% from 2009 to 2016, growing from approximately 100 000 to 160 000 (Coan, 2017). This figure measures only the entering cohort, not re-entering students, progressing to, or returning for further studies or postgraduate degrees.

The total higher education participation rate increased from 15% in 1996 to approximately 18% in 2015, and the national government aims to increase this to

25% by 2013 (DHET, 2015), an ambitious goal. In 2015, only 20% of eligible school-leavers were able to be placed at public institutions which indicates that the public sector is unable to meet the demand for tertiary education (CHE, 2016). Irrespective of the above challenges, I view myself as privileged for having had the opportunity not only to be a student, but also to build my career in the South African higher education system.

The public higher education sector in South Africa comprises 26 institutions. This was recently increased from 23 with the introduction of two new public institutions and a much-needed medical university. Govender (2016b) indicates that the number of students in public higher education doubled from 1994 to 2004, which clearly demonstrates the growing demand and oversubscription. The number of private higher education institutions is much greater (more than 100); however, these institutions are very different in terms of their scope, size, and disciplinary offerings and represent a mere 10% of the total higher education participation rate (Cloete, 2014). This means that only approximately 100 000 students are enrolled in private higher education institutions in South Africa (DHET, 2015), which is very low compared with the number of eligible students seeking higher education opportunities.

The South African government recognizes the need for private higher education and even for it to be expanded (DHET, 2013). One of the goals of the national education ministry is to increase the (combined public and private) tertiary participation rate from approximately 19% currently to 30% by 2030 (National Development Plan, 2012). This very optimistic goal was modified to a less ambitious 25% by 2013 one year later (DHET, 2013), as it became clear that the sector is not able to cope with the growth trajectory proposed by the government. The white paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) specifically recognized the need for private education to contribute to achieving this goal. It stated that the number of students participating in private higher education should grow from about 100 000 to approximately half a million by 2030.

In light of these factors, it is expected that the private higher education sector in South Africa will be on an upward growth trajectory (Carrim & Wangenge-Ouma, 2012); however, the reality is that it is far from reaching its full potential. The Council on Higher Education (2016, p. 8) confirms that the public system is 'undoubtedly under pressure, with a number of institutions struggling to keep the higher education project alive'. The assumption could be made that the current landscape provides the ideal opportunity for private higher education institutions to flourish due to the increased number of school-leavers seeking university places and the inability of the public universities to meet the demand (Coan, 2017).

Private institutions experienced an increase in student numbers around 2000 (Bitzer, 2002), but have not grown significantly over the last decade. As indicated above, there are approximately 100 registered private higher education institutions in South Africa (CHE, 2009); this number has remained relatively constant for the last few years. In the course of my professional career in higher education in South Africa, I spent an almost equal amount of time in the public and private sectors, and I was heavily involved in the regulatory aspects of the national higher education transformation agenda. During these engagements it became evident that the public higher education sector is advantaged, and that the private sector is not yet deemed a worthy player in the proposed unified higher education system (CHE, 2016). The private sector covers a spectrum that ranges from small institutions focusing on niche disciplines, such as agriculture, theology or nursing, to larger, more comprehensive institutions that offer courses across disciplines, though mostly at the undergraduate level and with a strong legacy of distance education provision (Stander & Herman, 2017).

Private institutions also focus on less cost-intensive offerings (such as business courses) that require less infrastructural investment and specialized facilities, and mostly use part-time faculty, especially during initial start-up years. Professional courses also require adherence to stringent accreditation standards, which are

mostly developed for application in the public higher education context. This would explain why the private sector is not yet contributing to the disciplinary areas that are the most needed in the South African and African context, namely engineering and medicine. Private education is contributing to the vocational space, and there are pockets of best practice involving industry partnerships, but acknowledging that there is a need for additional providers and different types of degrees (OECD, 2015). The national government does not invest in or subsidize private education at all, and private universities are thus fully self-funding. They typically function across multiple sites to ensure scale and presence and in this way attain cost efficiencies. The arrangements described above naturally lead to questions and concerns about quality that are amplified by the constrained research focus (Havergal, 2015b).

Furthermore, there is no classification system and all private institutions are deemed equal, which does not accurately reflect the different types of institutions or courses and is not especially helpful for supporting students' choices of the most suitable institution for their chosen career. Management and ownership arrangements of private institutions are diverse and are often not accounted for by the restrictions of government regulations on their operation. Some private institutions have foreign associations or affiliations, some are part of multi-national higher education consortia or networks, and some are locally owned, managed, and established (Stockley & De Wit, 2011). The regulatory framework is unsophisticated in catering for these different arrangements and there are unfortunately some low-quality providers (Fisher & Scott, 2011). Quality concerns, however, cannot and should not be generalized across the sector. Private institutions undergo the same rigorous scrutiny from government bodies; in some cases, it is even more stringent. However, the sector still appears to be unable to attract the overflow of students and continues to be unfavourably compared to public institutions (Lindeque, 2016).

In addition to all of these challenges faced by private institutions, the South

African Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (DHET, 1997b) regulates the use of the term 'university', which is restricted to public institutions. This makes it difficult for private institutions to establish themselves in the university space and to convince the public that they offer qualifications equivalent to university degrees. This inflexible approach leads to private institutions not being able to accurately identify and market themselves. For example, a small, agricultural niche provider is judged according to the same standards as a multi-site private university with a comprehensive suite of offerings. Again, this contributes to a lack of awareness and visibility of the extensive regulatory scrutiny that requires both institutional and course-level approval and accreditation.

Over the last two decades, the South African government has repeatedly communicated its aim of establishing a unified, coordinated higher education system that includes both private and public institutions (CHE, 2016; DHET, 1997a). It thus aims to support private higher education as an option to be considered by students. The founding document of the national Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC, the standing quality governance structure of the CHE) clearly indicates that both public and private institutions are subject to the same quality assurance and regulatory requirements (HEQC, 2001). Havergal (2015a) criticizes the government for not being able to regulate the sectors accordingly, a factor which leads to inconsistent perceptions. The authorities are also aware that information about private higher education institutions is not systematically collected (CHE, 2009), which leads to further unbalanced speculation.

After many years, the above-stated aim has not been realized and there is thus a need to build the reputation of private higher education institutions in order to ensure that they are associated with quality provision so that they may attract greater numbers of students. It is understandable that, in such a diverse sector, there are private institutions offering lesser quality programmes. Some of these are certainly business-oriented and profit-driven; unfortunately, there are also those that do not display an understanding of the core business of universities,

which in some ways justifies the perceptions and contributes to the negative experiences (Deacon, Van Vuuren & Augustyn, 2014).

2. Statement of the problem

It is clear from the above that there are widespread concerns about the academic credibility of private institutions in South Africa due to their corporate approaches and profit-driven financial practices. These not only impact affordability, but also perceptions of a lack of academic quality and rigour (DHET, 2013). There is a need to build trust and public confidence to ensure that students consider private higher education as an alternative to an already over-subscribed public sector. Shattock (2006; 2012) is of the view that sound governance can improve the standing and reputation of private institutions. However, very limited information is available about governance practices in South African private higher education and they are perceived to be inconsistent, unclear, or non-existent. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of governance practices at private higher education institutions in South Africa through the shared experiences of those closest to it.

After more than 20 years of democracy, there is no clear indication of the state of governance in higher education in South Africa (Lange & Luescher-Mamashela, as cited in CHE, 2016), let alone in the private higher education sector. The complexity of the context described above amplifies the need for sound governance structures and approaches. Governance can be defined as the interactions between the system (i.e. the state) and the institutions. Sufficient attention has not been granted to institutional governance in either public or private institutions; rather, the focus has been on governance failures (CHE, 2016).

The post-1994 political focus is continuously challenging the relationship between the state and institutions, and there have not been significant changes

to the manner in which universities are governed in South Africa since 1994. The focus has primarily been on equality of representation; however, the composition is still described as 'racially-based, authoritarian, discriminatory, exclusionary and elitist' (Universities South Africa, 2015, p. 7). The Higher Education Act of 1997 (DHET, 1997b) provides for the reformulation of internal governance structures under the new dispensation and introduced principles such as corporate governance, transparency, democracy, and inclusivity, as well as broader representation (Universities South Africa, 2015, p. 8). Unfortunately, tensions are increasingly evident, which shows the deep systemic differences in approaches to and traditions of governance practices (Universities South Africa, 2015).

Besides political influences still lingering since 1994, I have personally observed the differences in governance structures in public and private institutions in South Africa. Public institutions are known for their traditional bureaucratic governance approaches, as described by Birnbaum (1988), which are discussed in greater detail later in the thesis. My work in the private sector, however, has made it clear to me that governance models in private institutions are very different and are more aligned with corporate governance, as postulated by Braun (1999), also to be discussed later. Governance practices vary significantly between institutions, even within the private sector. That governance practices are definitely present is expected due to company registration rules and financial audit requirements. In the case of foreign-owned providers, these practices extend beyond the jurisdiction of South African law. However, governance is practiced very different to what I was exposed to while working in the public sector. Political influences aside, I observed a drastic change of focus, from structures driven by academic content (e.g. by senate or an academic board) to corporate content (e.g. by a board of directors).

Collis (as cited in Tierney, 2004) is of the view that governance structures in both public and private higher education sectors are weak. He makes it clear that

traditional governance approaches should not necessarily be viewed as being of high quality or implying sound governance. The Higher Education Act (DHET, 1997b) presents a framework for democratic institutional governance structures for public institutions in South Africa; however, the Council on Higher Education (2016) confirms that there are no guidelines for governance practices for private institutions. Irrespective of the guidance available to public institutions, there is ample evidence of maladministration, corruption, systems issues, and continuous risk management in South African universities, which amplifies the need for increased and more effective governance (Universities South Africa, 2015). The dire need for governance intensified during recent political events in which student and staff protests erupted, and fee increases, outsourcing arrangements, and management capability were questioned (Hall, 2016). The impact of these disruptions is not underestimated by institutions, government and communities and they are far from being resolved. The violence has caused fear that is now further eroding belief in the entire higher education sector, let alone private institutions. It also leads to further questions about the effectiveness of governance structures that should support staff engagement. Marcus (2017) aptly summarizes the wish of all South Africans – that this situation is resolved through constructive and robust conversations rather than through violence and destruction.

A number of public institutions have also been placed under administration, as allowed by the Higher Education Act (DHET, 1997b). No less than 14 independent assessors were appointed from 1994 to 2012 (Universities South Africa, 2015), and were tasked with investigating complaints and concerns brought to the attention of the Ministry of Higher Education in an attempt to produce an independent report of the issues experienced at those particular institutions. Higher Education South Africa (HESA, 2012), now Universities South Africa, conducted an analysis of the assessor reports and found that the majority of the issues identified could be categorised into four main areas: inefficient governance

structures, the relationship between university councils and staff, ineffective institutional structures, and management failures (HESA, 2012). In addition to the above evidence, many South African academics continue to express dissatisfaction with how institutions are governed (Nkosi, 2013; Nkosi, 2015). It is thus clear that there is internal dissatisfaction with governance practices at public institutions, as well as evidence of external interventions highlighting severe governance issues in the public sector.

Private institutions are publicly criticized for lacking comparable academic quality and view is also promulgated by the government (Coan, 2017; DHET, 2013). A critical way of increasing the credibility of the private higher education sector is through the demonstration of sound and transparent governance that can provide a framework for decision-making on matters relating to the academic project (Shattock, 2006). Public universities are perceived to be able to demonstrate governance, both because they are constituted by the government and through years of building a reputation. However, governance practices in private higher education, particularly in the South African context, are unclear and are perceived to be non-existent and dominated by corporate content. There appears to be a lack of understanding and analysis of governance practices, which are at the core of demonstrating credibility and transparency (Tierney, 2004). It is thus necessary to determine how improved governance can assist in building academic credibility in order to ensure the visibility of the contribution private institutions intend to make (Carrim & Wangenge-Ouma, 2012).

3. The need for sound governance

Shattock (2006) is of the view that university governance has been an interesting and controversial topic for many years. He postulates that both industry and higher education around the world are faced with governance, management, and leadership challenges (Shattock, 2006). As pressures increase, the need for sound

governance and management practices, as well as dynamic and transformational leaders, is more critical than ever (Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Armstrong, 2014). Academic and corporate governance are driven and designed by academic and administrative leaders and managers who are confronted with the need to improve quality and who increasingly find efficiencies in operations. Governance structures need to support these changes and be responsive to them as the key drivers of institutional transformation (Greatbatch, 2014). Leaders and managers in higher education are often viewed as incompetent to deal with the challenges facing institutions; this has brought governance issues to the fore (Vidovich & Currie, 2011; Wolhuter et al. in Locke, Cummings & Fisher, 2011). Academic institutions need forward-thinking leaders and management teams driving efficiencies and displaying flexibility and progressive approaches to governance.

The Oxford Latin desk dictionary defines the term 'governance' is derived from the Latin *gubernare*, which means 'to direct, rule or guide'; it was originally used in ancient times to refer to steering a vessel at sea (Morwood, 2005). Sultana (2012, p. 348) contextualizes this for contemporary use, describing governance as first, a process (i.e. governance), second, a body or institution (i.e. government), and third, an action involving pointing or steering in a purposeful manner (i.e. governing). Governance can also be defined as:

Structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive. (Unesco, 2017, n.p.)

It is clear from the above definition that governance is present and needed in both corporate and institutional environments. It is furthermore becoming evident that

corporate approaches can be acceptable in higher education institutions. In the education context, corporate governance relates to the framework of policies, procedures, and structures in an institution that guide and lead towards the achievement of corporate objectives (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, n.d.). The unique aspect to be governed in universities (as opposed to corporate companies) is the core academic business, which is described by Shattock (2006) and Tierney (2004) as a framework for decision-making for matters relating to the academic project or its outcomes. This is the element that differentiates universities and corporate companies. Boyd (in Vilkinas & Peters, 2014, p. 16) explains that academic governance should be 'at the heart of a university's operations', and that it is often viewed as complex and uncertain. Both corporate and academic governance should be present in higher education; however, the extent of their implementation and balance may differ from institution to institution. It is recognized that the private sector is largely dominated by smaller, niche providers, and that academic structures are often not present (CHE, 2016), which does make the operation of academic governance more challenging.

Collis (in Tierney, 2004, p. 126) summarizes the core governance issue in higher education as the presence of a 'paradox of scope' between corporate and academic worlds. This means that the nature of universities results in control being spread across a range of activities. Thus, governance issues arise from a declining focus on the core academic business and the expansion of institutional boundaries, which allow various influences to impact on the institution. With the increasing capacity of and the role needed to be played by private institutions, there is recognition that higher education is venturing into corporate territory and therefore that corporate cultures are evident (Christopher, 2014a). The question often asked is why this is perceived to be unacceptable, especially in the private sector. All universities should be equally expected to establish or maintain a corporate culture in an academic environment. There is a definite realization that

universities will never be or become entirely corporate, but that there is a need to adapt corporate practices to them (Birnbaum, 1988). It should be recognized that growth and reputation are important, thus necessitating an increase in commercial activities in universities beyond what is provided by the government.

It is clear from the above that universities globally need to reinvent themselves and that university leaders are being challenged to reconsider the manner in which they govern and manage institutions (Bacon, 2014; Tierney, 2004). Irrespective of the strategic direction institutions take or the context in which they operate, this should determine how they govern and manage their way through these times of change, while retaining educational values and a research focus in an ethical, independent, and responsive manner (Granados, 2015). The literature does not produce a preferred model or approach to governance, and more specifically, there is no ideal model of 'good governance' that can be replicated in higher education due to contextual and institutional differences (Bótas & Huisman, 2012). The governance models present in higher education (e.g. Baldrige, 1971; Birnbaum, 1988) are principally derived from management theory, which up to the present have been viewed as unsuitable for academic contexts.

Even in the absence of an ideal model, it became clear to me that there is an increased need for accountability and mature management practices. Institutions are left to build trust and prove themselves to the public. Hénard and Mitterle (2009) make it clear that better governance leads to increased trust, which in turn leads to autonomy and efficiency. Higher education institutions are traditionally notorious for stagnation, which makes adapting to new ways of doing things challenging. Institutional philosophies, culture, and structures are challenged as this sector, like many others, is progressing and moving forward. However, during times of instability, universities are forced to experiment and to modify their approaches to their core business and academic practices (Tierney, 2004). This not

only requires new and innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and research, but also a reconsideration of management and governance practices.

As a higher education professional, specifically in the field of quality assurance, I have had the opportunity to serve on various national governance structures, which has given me insight into the governance structures of institutions. I have seen, both directly and through evidence provided by institutions, that real engagement opportunities are not available. Universities are expected to encourage debates and discussions; however, governance has, in my observation, has become a compliance activity rather than a point of contact where administrators, academics, students, and other stakeholders can connect and engage. It should give a voice to all to ensure collective responsibility and impact (Zaman, 2015).

4. The purpose, the research question, and my motivation to undertake the study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of governance practices at private higher education institutions in South Africa through the shared experiences of those operating closest to it. A qualitative phenomenological study, using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach is conducted to answer the primary research question: *What are the experiences of practitioners involved in governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa?* This is considered to be the most suitable methodology as it attempts to increase understanding of a particular phenomenon and how it is interpreted by those closest to it (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data and factual information about private higher education in South Africa is inconsistent and not well documented. Private education is not publicly funded, although it is heavily regulated (Ayo, 2015). Private institutions are perceived to

focus on business imperatives, which often overshadows the educational quality of, and good work done in, some of them (Hunt, Callender & Parry, 2016). There is also recognition of the need for direction and capacity development (CHE, 2007). This is amplified in the South African context with an increasing number of illegal providers causing the public to be rightfully cautious and skeptical (Sehoole, 2015). The next section of the introduction focuses on the practice-based motivation for the study and the research questions that guide the project.

5. Significance and framework of the study

The idea for the study was principally derived from my professional experience in higher education in South Africa, specifically in quality assurance. Over the course of almost two decades, I have been an active participant and professional, regularly engaging with both regulatory authorities and institutions in the South African higher education context and participating in the development of the quality assurance agenda led by the national authorities. This has led to exposure to both the public and private sectors and, more specifically, to how institutions are managed and governed as well as to the differences between these sectors. My involvement has also included participation in various quality assurance processes, such as programme accreditation and institutional audits, as part of the national quality assurance agenda outlined in various national documents (CHE, 2016). It became clear from the responses of administrators and academics during institutional reviews that there are inconsistent governance practices at private institutions.

This led to me to question how governance relates to quality outcomes and how institutions can be governed and managed more efficiently, thereby driving both the academic and corporate agendas. The main issue that struck me is that a great deal of time is spent on inefficient, fruitless, and tedious governance activities with no clear purpose or outcome, or that there is a complete lack of governance

structures, specifically academic governance structures. With this study, I would like to either confirm or invalidate those beliefs. One would assume that university environments would encourage critical engagement and collaboration. Universities proudly teach the importance of engagement, critical thinking, and inquisitiveness. Students are exposed to case studies and assignments to encourage informed decision-making; however, there are discrepancies between what is taught at universities about governance, and what is practiced. Burke (2010) explains this gap between academic freedom and governance, in terms of which institutions often exclude or excuse themselves from sound governance practices by using academic freedom as the scapegoat for ad hoc and incoherent behavior. The purpose here is to determine the alignment between what private South African education institutions publish, do, and say about governance. This study also questions the experiences and perceptions of governance and explores the purpose and nature of these engagements. The state of governance can be determined by the perceived value it adds, the content of the discussions, participation, its impact on scholarship and daily academic activities, and, ultimately, the extent to which it enhances the quality of higher education.

In the course of my practice-based engagements, I was confronted with a lack of guidance or principles that can be utilized and contextually applied to support sound governance (Wilson & Chapman, 2013b). I identified a need for a framework to guide private universities, one that is specifically aimed at creating coherence between academic and corporate governance at a scale that would be relevant and efficient, while still addressing academic credibility and corporate requirements. National policies and regulatory documents are not prescriptive and private institutions are not governed by constitutions or established by the government; thus their state of governance is largely unknown. Minimal guidance is provided to new private institutions on how to set up governance structures – what is available is relevant to public institutions only, though there is limited research on governance in public institutions (Arnolds, Stofile & Lilla, 2013).

Private institutions are diverse in size and in the scope of offerings, which complicates the provision of a governance model or governance requirements. Due to the for-profit objective of most private institutions, financial or corporate governance are forced upon them through company registration or audit requirements; however, academic governance is viewed to be neglected or lacking.

This study explores the theoretical underpinnings of governance as it is applied to private higher education in South Africa. The sector is exposed to an ever-expanding quality assurance agenda and context, as applied to public institutions. This agenda and context provide the basis for the analysis of current governance practices in private institutions. The outcomes of the study provide insight into the scope and nature of governance practices and can inform the implementation of improved and transparent governance practices in the sector in order to ensure its credibility and build its reputation. The essential elements of governance are captured here and can be used as a point of reference when institutions are designing, crafting, and improving their governance structures. The mandate from the South African government to create a unified, single, and coordinated higher education system (HEQC, 2004) cannot be ignored – the study aims to provide some insight into the sector. The findings of the study can generate increased awareness and an improved understanding of the private higher education sector in South Africa.

The structure of the thesis is outlined in the next section of this chapter. This provides an overview of the areas covered in the subsequent chapters and how the findings can be linked to the above research question.

6. Thesis structure

This section provides an outline of the structure of this thesis. First, I provide an overview of governance and the different approaches to it applied in higher

education. I will review the foundations of governance in the literature, and the various governance approaches and models. This includes, at the one end of the spectrum, the more traditional approach or shared governance and, at the other extreme, corporate governance. I also briefly touch on the work of some of the most dominant authors in the field, such as Clark (1983), Braun (1999), Birnbaum (1988), and Van Vught (1993). I consider how their work has influenced thinking about governance in higher education with specific reference to Shattock's conceptual model (2012). I then examine research conducted in the field of higher education governance and consider research relating to governance in the South African higher education landscape.

Chapter 3 of the thesis covers the research design and the IPA approach, explaining the methods of data collection, analysis, and the themes identified. It explains how participants were identified and discusses document analysis and the qualitative interview process. Furthermore, how a rigorous design and process were ensured through a consideration of the key features of trustworthiness, reflexivity, and validity is explained. Following the discussion of the methods of data analysis, some ethical considerations are outlined.

Chapter 4 presents the findings on the state of governance in private higher education in South Africa as experienced by the practitioners; I answer the research questions based on these findings. Next, the limitations of the study and areas identified for further research are discussed. Then, conclusions are derived as an attempt to assist private higher education institutions to progress towards a more innovative approach to governance in order to ensure increased academic quality and to build credibility in the system.

The thesis closes with a presentation of the core findings and an outline of some possible implications of these; and, finally, with an assessment the use of the IPA methodology and an outline of possible implications for practitioners.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

1. Introduction

The aim of the literature review is to provide an overview of what has been presented in the literature on the topic of the study, that is, on governance, specifically governance in higher education. The literature review also explores the origins and theoretical underpinnings of the concept of governance in organizations and, for the purpose of this study, how this has progressively found its way into higher education. It focuses primarily on my interpretation of the literature on governance in higher education and explains my understanding of the field of governance, how this is applied in higher education, and, more specifically, in private higher education.

This chapter furthermore explains the difference between a theoretical and a conceptual framework and how this informed the study. The theoretical framework was identified as relating to the origins of the discipline of governance as part of management theory; the chapter outlines the main areas of management theory and how these are related to governance models and approaches, particularly shared governance, also referred to as collegiality (Anthony, 2004), and corporate governance. The chapter then ventures to discuss the views of the principal authors in the discipline of governance in higher education, explaining how this migrated from corporate to university environments. The chapter also provides an overview of previous research on governance in higher education, with specific reference to the South African context. The aim is to provide insight into the nature and limitations of the research conducted in this field to date.

It is clear from the literature that there is no single or prescribed model for how to govern and manage universities, and in particular different sectors and types

of institutions. The literature considered relates mostly to governance structures and participation levels in public universities, as is discussed in the next chapter. It became evident while studying this topic that governance practices are very different in different institutions. Governance is contextual and there is some evidence that private institutions contain some unique elements that expose them to corporate governance models (Matengu, Likando & Kangumu, 2014; Tomlinson, 2011). An overview is provided of the key aspects of the different governance models and approaches found in higher education. Attention is given to traditional versus corporate governance approaches, with the aim of providing an increased understanding of their manifestation and presence in higher education environments.

The chapter concludes by providing two iterations of a conceptual framework, as derived from the literature review and consideration of research in the field, as well as evidence of good governance practice. These conceptual maps evolved during the research process, having originated in the various theories and writings in this field. These concept maps are used to inform the study, formulate the research questions, determine the methods of analysis, and present the findings.

2. Theoretical framework

The aim of a theoretical framework is to anchor research within the literature in the particular field. Henning (2004) states that the theoretical framework helps to align the key concepts considered in a study and provides the underlying outline and structure. It provides a frame of reference for a research study (Merriam, in Wang, 2015). Both qualitative and quantitative studies need to be grounded in theory or a combination of theories to ensure that there is a clear theoretical foundation underlying the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the theoretical framework as a research map that charts the origins of the topic and what is required for it to progress. The theoretical framework is thus the basis for

the literature review; the research methods selected and the data analysis and presentation of findings are undertaken through this lens (Ocholla & Le Roux, 2011). In addition, it reflects the personal beliefs and understanding of the researcher to ensure readers can put themselves in the shoes of the researcher. It was a useful process for me, as a researcher, to study the literature and in this way to be exposed to what has been published about governance in a variety of fields, and to confirm that my understanding of governance in higher education is derived from a range of management theories which have evolved over time.

In some cases, a research study will rely on a single existing and often well-known theory. The study will then utilize the concepts of the particular theory as the framework. Alternatively, a study can be based on combination of theories. For example, in the field of educational leadership, there are various theories that can be used for the purpose of research. These include behavioural theory, feminist theory, relational theory, gender theory, change theory, identity theory, and transformational theory, to name but a few (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Should one of the above theories be applicable to and suitable for the particular study, it provides the necessary conceptual elements and terminology and locates the problem within the theoretical context. Some research studies, however, do not fit squarely within a single theory, but rather in the culmination of different theories, in this way building a theoretical framework from multiple theories.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that a theoretical framework contains the concepts and assumptions that support the study, outlining the key aspects and how they relate to each other. This relationship between different concepts becomes increasingly important when a combination of theories is used. This definition leads to an important distinction between theoretical and conceptual frameworks which should be explained. As mentioned above, a theoretical framework is derived from existing theories (Grant & Osanloo, 2014) that have been tried, tested, are used widely, and are viewed as particularly relevant to the

problem in question. A conceptual framework or map is 'a structure of what has been learned to best explain the natural progression of a phenomenon that is being studied' (Camp, 2001, p. 21). It thus provides an overview of the understanding of the researcher of the topic and the existing theories and how he or she then conceptualize the relationships and interrelationships between the concepts, assumptions, and beliefs. A conceptual map or framework is often presented visually to ensure that it clearly conveys how the ideas found in the literature relate to each other. In the case of this study, the conceptual framework is derived from a variety of theories, research studies, and articles on governance with a view to clarifying and proposing relationships that are suitable and sensible for higher education in the first instance, and in the context of private higher education in particular. Weaver-Hart (1988) explains the process of constructing a conceptual framework and how helps and guides the thinking of the researcher. It has allowed me to draw on a number of theories, approaches, models and best-practice examples rather than identifying one particular theory. This study thus cannot be located within a single or linear theoretical framework as higher education governance is a broad concept that has been constructed on the basis of various disciplines and bodies of work, and is complex within the private higher education sector.

For the purpose of this study, the work of key authors in the field is considered part of the conceptualization process; it assisted with determining the theoretical framework, management theory, as well as creating a conceptual map for this study, as presented in two iterations in this chapter. The origins of modern governance lie in management theory. This deals with organizations and aims to produce environments conducive to successful operations and service delivery (Koontz & Weihrich, 1990). Management theory is complex, evolved over many decades, and contains numerous definitions and iterations of concepts. It has been redeveloped over the years as we learn more about organizations, human interaction, group dynamics, productivity, and the way in which employees

engage with one another and management (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). It is within these points of engagement, some formal and other more informal, that governance nestles. Governance may be more corporate or collegial in nature, and thus prescribed or more organic, but it driven by people, personalities, and power relationships. It is from these corporate origins that governance has made its way into higher education.

The section that follows focuses on the origins of governance in management theory and the main schools of thought, demonstrating how governance evolved from a corporate to an educational environment.

3. The origins of governance

The term 'governance' is derived from the Latin word 'gubernare', meaning "to direct, rule or guide" (Stevenson, 2015). As indicated above, it was initially used in ancient times to describe the activity of steering a vessel at sea in order to direct it through the open water. It subsequently emerged in a corporate context, where it concerns the presence of structures and mechanisms for steering towards the achievement of organizational goals. Steering and managing organizational direction is the collective responsibility of all those who work together. This requires different skills and competencies and, more importantly, an understanding of how these engage with one another. This engagement can be informal, such as relates to the more intangible distribution of power, or more formal, such as through committees and structures (Stone, 2013).

This brings us to the definition of the term 'governance', where aspects of leadership, management, and strategic direction intersect (Kooiman, 2003; Marginson and Considine in Locke et al., 2011). Governance provides the overarching framework for decision-making (the strategic direction of the organization) and how leaders influence the decisions (based on skills and

expertise); management teams are responsible for implementing decisions (execution). Governance structures thus comprise leaders who act on behalf of management groups, who in turn decide on day-to-day operational activities in order to ensure that decisions are executed. Consequently, the governance framework, leadership, and management teams should be aligned as to the agreed outcomes of the goals to be achieved (Fourie, as cited in Bitzer, 2009). According to Havergal (2015a) and Gallagher (2001), strong governance is built on the basis of a sound relationship between leadership and management in order to bring about organizational coherence. Thus, individual leaders and management teams participate in governance structures in which relationships are formed and points of engagement are created to ensure discussion that leads to informed decision-making.

These issues confirm the origins of governance in the vast discipline of management theory and have been written about extensively. McGrath (2014) provides a useful overview of the three main eras of the thinking, history, and evolving management theory, which can be conceptually summarized as follows:

- a.) **Execution** – Some of the earliest writing on management theory was that of Taylor (1865–1915) in which the principles of scientific management were outlined. Taylor concentrated on how tasks were broken down into manageable sections, and how organisations can ultimately be efficient and productive, while largely ignoring the human element and relations with and between employees (Perrow, 1991). Although Taylor's work did not focus on engagement, he did view the workplace as a co-operative environment in which conflict is overcome and opportunities are created to discuss execution plans. He thus provides evidence of early forms of informal governance.

- b.) **Expertise** – This era of management theory concerned the importance of prescribed roles and the efforts and abilities of the people working for the organisation. It outlines the importance of hierarchical organisational structures and is primarily represented by the work of Weber (1864–1924), which exemplifies the height of bureaucracy and the importance of those in positions of power (Daft & Armstrong, 2009). During this time, it became increasingly important to record rules, decisions, and actions. This required evidence of formal governance structures.
- c.) **Empathy** – As management theory evolved, the behavioural aspects of leadership became increasingly important. Attention shifted to leaders and how they treat employees in the workplace and the study of behavioural patterns in organisations. Drucker (1909–2005) is credited with a modern approach to management and leadership that emphasises ethics, integrity, and the motivation of employees that aimed to inspire leaders to show empathy in the workplace (Drucker, 1957). This era introduced a more social and relational approach to governance with the emphasis on both informal and formal employee engagement.

There are various ways to classify the journey and evolution of management theory; however, for the purpose of the study, the points discussed above provide a high level of insight into the main eras that capture the essence of various management theories, namely the people, the organization, and the goals to be achieved. Governance approaches and structures thus help to steer the organization and provide points of the connection for execution, empathy, and expertise (Rhodes, 1997). These schools of thought have clarified my understanding of the origins of governance within the discipline of management, which deals broadly with providing structure within organization, mechanisms to manage and steer people, and, ultimately, the achievement of organizational goals.

4. Approaches to governance in higher education

It is clear from the above discussion that management and governance practices are specific to a particular organization. The principles of management theory outline key features that can then be adopted and applied in various contexts. For the purpose of this study, these concepts are applied to an organizational environment that focuses on education and research. Educational management has been recognized as a field of study since the late 1960s (Bush, 2011), and Burke (2010) confirms that this also applies to higher education and academic environments. Higher education has adopted various principles derived from management theory; however, conflicting views are presented in the literature regarding the merit, applicability, and uniqueness of these principles for universities as compared to typical corporate environments (Herek, 1995). Considerable evidence has been found of universities evolving and becoming more complex due to 'corporatization', which in turn would support the adoption of management models and approaches from the corporate sector (Burgan, cited in Tierney, 2004, p. 56; Cahill & Irving, 2015).

Governance can thus be approached as being a continuum with two extreme ends. On the one end, there are collegial, shared governance approaches, as supported by Baldrige (1971) and Burke (2010). On the other end of the continuum, governance approaches can be more corporate and managerial. These different approaches are discussed later in this chapter. According to Boggs (2010), there is no preferred approach. Different points along this continuum would be fitting and appropriate for different types of institutions; in some cases, these approaches merge to form a unique approach to governance. Historically, universities might be viewed as supporting collegial governance, as they were traditionally closely linked to the church, the students, and the communities within which they exist. However, the community also includes industries and

governments as key stakeholders that are interested in the contribution of higher education to economic growth and advancement. This might create the perception that corporate approaches to university governance are preferred. Institutions of higher learning thus include both corporate and academic activities, which justifies a unique approach to governance to ensure engagement on different levels and in key administrative and academic areas. In essence, governance structures contribute to the establishment of essential relationships. In the context of these structured relationships, universities approve policies and plans, make decisions and 'account for their probity, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness' (Locke et al., 2011, p. 2)

As mentioned earlier, there is no preferred or ideal approach to governance. Similarly, there is no single model of 'good governance' that can be applied to higher education institutions. Bótas and Huisman (2012) confirm that each company and university is different and a 'one size fits all' approach is not applicable. Irrespective of this, Sultana (2012) makes it clear that governance practices reveal much about an institution, its culture, its operations, and where and how decisions are made. Neave (2006) agrees with Boggs (2010, p.1) that university governance is 'a conceptual shorthand for the way higher education systems and institutions are organized and managed'. The variety and wide-range of practices are clearly documented and published in the public domain, and are understandable in light of the complexity and evolving nature of institutions. Each is unique, even if they are located in the same regulatory environment or the same country. In most instances, governance approaches are selected by institutions themselves, as deemed fit for their purpose and context.

Shattock (2006) highlights the need to extend participation in governance beyond the borders of universities. External participation is viewed as a 'significant driver of change' (Middlehurst, 1999, p. 309) and it brings fresh views and perspectives to institutions. This necessitates points of connection between internal and

external governance. Marginson and Considine (2000) explain that governance is the point where internal and external relationships intersect. Birnbaum (in Bótas & Huisman, 2012) draws attention to internal participation and how it should be used as a vehicle for communication. There is, however, a need for active engagement with both administrative and academic staff at the appropriate levels, and between internal governance (the policies and procedures adopted by the institution) and external governance (government policies, legislation, and environmental influences) (Weir, Laing & McKnight, 2002). Shattock (2003, p. 19) makes it clear that ‘universities, like companies, need organizational structures which are sufficiently flexible to respond to external stimuli’.

There have been attempts to modernize and evolve governance structures. Such processes are supported by De Boer, Huisman and Meister-Scheytt (2010), who indicate that in many instances the roles of governing bodies have changed and new bodies have been established; thus there has been some progress in thinking and changes from traditional approaches to governance have occurred. The traditional, shared governance approach is discussed first, and is followed by a discussion of the corporate governance approach, which represents the other end of the governance spectrum. Evidence for both of these approaches is found in higher education institutions.

4.1 Shared governance and collegiality

At first glance, concepts such as shared governance and collegiality resonate with universities. As organizations, higher education institutions are assumed to be collegial in their approaches to governance, with a shared sense of purpose and with academic views reflected in strategic decisions (Hardy, 1996). Shared governance models are linked to a culture of collegiality rather than to individual agendas (Miller & Katz, 2004). Shattock (2006) explains that shared governance needs to be managed well to ensure that institutional goals are striven for and

achieved and by all. The disadvantage of this approach to governance is that it is owned by all and levels of accountability are difficult to define. The concept of collegial governance was introduced by Baldrige (1971), and Burke (2010) is deemed to be the father of shared governance. The principles of these approaches overlap and both appear to be a good fit with the intentions and traditions of universities. They can be summarized as being transparent and as creating time and space for collegial discussions and debate (Bahls, 2014).

As much as shared governance appears to be the ideal governance model for universities, it is still criticized. Sultana (2012) is of the view that shared governance is theoretically sound, but much more difficult to implement than expected. Many academics indicate that even when institutions claim to be collegial, they experience hierarchical decision-making rather than extensive consultation (Locke et al., 2011). Thus, the experiences and perceptions of academics are often not consistent with a culture of shared governance. The higher education sector is expanding rapidly and institutions differ in terms of the size and scope of their offerings, which results in collegial management becoming increasingly complex (Locke et al., 2011). Historically, universities were relatively small and managed by peers or even self-managed; however, they have now evolved convoluted organizational structures that are continually affected by internal and external challenges. Kezar and Eckel (2004) are of the view that shared governance limits flexibility and responsiveness due to the delays caused by extensive consultation processes. Another disadvantage of shared governance is outlined by Rowlands (2012), who proposes that it often assumes or settles for the current state and does not allow for critical and analytical discussions.

Collegiality is also threatened by increasing accountability and the demands placed on universities. Meyer (2007) supports this view, stating that tensions are increasing due to the challenges involved in balancing internal collegiality while meeting demands for external accountability. In some cases, quick decisions are

required to ensure compliance with constantly changing regulations, which will not necessarily be possible in a collegial, shared governance environment. This leads us to need to consider whether shared and collegial governance only flourished in ancient times when universities were small and contained (Hartman & Treadgold, 2007). Henkel (2005) also warns that they might not be relevant in modern university contexts.

Other features of shared governance are representation, joint effort, continual communication, and differentiated levels of participation from different constituencies (Kaufmann, 1993). In the university context, shared governance can assist in bridging the divide between administrators and academics. However, it may also amplify threats to academic autonomy and freedom, as it involves joint planning and resource allocation and includes topics that academics are not always comfortable discussing (Shattock, 2012). Some academics believe that they only need to be involved in decisions relating to academic matters (Locke et al., 2011) and Scott (2002; 2010) suggests that academics are not always equipped to discuss broader institutional matters. The devaluation of academic input is also visible in cases where academic boards and senates hold ‘substantial symbolic power’, rather than making actual decisions and discussing matters of strategic importance (Rowlands, 2013, p. 341). The *University World News* (2013) accurately describes this as ‘shared ignorance’ rather than shared governance. Notwithstanding the different views regarding shared governance, there is a clear desire for collegial governance models from university administration and academics (Bótas & Huisman, 2012).

4.2 Corporate governance

On the other end of the spectrum, the literature outlines various examples of corporate governance approaches finding their way into universities. Shattock (2006) mentions that this is not surprising as universities are businesses in their

own right. University structures often mirror those of corporate companies, and they are managed to achieve the desired results and to ensure stakeholder satisfaction, which fits well with a corporate governance approach. Contrary to popular belief, corporate governance does not exclude consultation and collegiality, even if it is more bureaucratic in nature (Birnbaum, 1988). In a corporate governance model, the roles and responsibilities of participants are defined, and the structured communication opportunities provide all role players a voice (Locke et al., 2011).

Corporate governance is a managerial model and is more bureaucratic and prescriptive than shared governance (Brondoni, 2006). However, it does build confidence in university managers and leaders, which has eroded due to the lack of structured and consultative decision-making processes (Meyer, 2007; Tricker, 1984). Corporate governance approaches are not prescriptive about management structures and positions, a factor which will be acceptable to universities (Bótas & Huisman, 2012). The roles of leaders in businesses and academic environments are different, and if a corporate governance approach were followed, the vice-chancellor (or equivalent) would be seen as an executive rather than as an academic leader. This might raise questions about the incumbent's ability to demonstrate academic leadership (Shattock, 2012).

There are, however, a number of benefits to applying corporate governance principles to higher education. First, it improves response times and the speed of decision-making whereas these are usually extensive and non-conclusive (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Second, a corporate culture provides for greater financial accountability with increased emphasis on efficient resource utilization and performance management. Furthermore, it strengthens institutional management structures in order to ensure progress on policy and planning initiatives (Christopher, 2014). On the other hand, certain disadvantages are evident. These include low morale due to highly regulated and managerial approaches,

conflicting views about the nature of higher education and business, and changes in institutional culture, values, and integrity. Such disadvantages do not always have a negative impact, though they can result in academics increasingly distrusting administrators and managers who act in corporate roles and do not focus on advancing the core business of universities. This may lead to tension and to academic staff feeling disempowered (Watty, 2003).

When discussing corporate governance approaches, it is worth mentioning the increase in references to the so-called 'entrepreneurial university' (Mascarenhas et al., 2017, p. 316). Such rhetoric encourages a business-aligned governance structure and involves claims that it is well-suited to higher education institutions (Goedgebuure & Hayden, 2007, p. 4). In the context of declining state funding and subsidies, it is not unexpected that universities would need to venture into entrepreneurial activities to ensure sustainability and additional income streams. It is, however, not fair to assume that entrepreneurial universities would neglect academic activities as a result of commercialization; rather, this approach is necessitated by the need to generate funds to maintain and enhance their academic position (Shattock, 2003). Van Vught (1993, p. 8) describes such institutions as needing to find a balance between 'academic drift' and 'professional shift'.

According to Sultana (2012), for-profit and private institutions are more likely to adopt corporate governance strategies. In the study of governance or the lack thereof in private higher education in the South African context, the problem can be related to the governance approaches that are in place, that is, how governance is currently carried out in this sector in this country. Observing the lack of governance assisted me as researcher in gaining an understanding of the problem, and it justifies the purpose of this research to determine the state of governance of private higher education in South Africa. The study is framed by what we already know about governance as a component of management theory in

corporate environments, its migration to higher education environments, and the added complexity of the private higher education sector, which has both corporate goals and an academic agenda. Management theory thus serves as the foundation for my study, which is suitably derived from corporate environments and explains the challenges and benefits of applying this theory to education environments.

5. Governance models

Sultana (2012) provides a useful explanation of the various concepts associated with governance in the present day. He first describes *governance* as a process, for example, the process of governing an organization or institution. Second, the use of the concept of *government* refers to the body or institution; and finally, the action of pointing or steering in a purposeful manner is *governing*. This demonstrates the versatility of the meaning and its applicability in different contexts. Universities are governed, the government is a major stakeholder (for both public and private institutions), and evidence of governance is required – thus introducing the concept of academic governance.

Shattock (2006) describes academic governance as a framework for decision-making on matters relating to academic activities. Boyd (as cited in Vilkinas and Peters, 2014, p. 16) explains that academic activities and hence the governance thereof should be ‘at the heart of a university’s operations, and that it can often be viewed as complex and uncertain. The most common structure responsible for academic governance is the academic board (Mortimer & McConnell, 1991; Rowlands, 2017). The academic board (or equivalent structure) should focus on matters impacting on academic quality, thus dealing with the core business of universities. Vilkinas and Peters (2014) agree that academic boards are key to overseeing and maintaining quality standards; however, they also extend its role to include strategic leadership on academic issues, which is a matter beyond

procedural aspects such as academic promotions, academic policy formulation and approval, and quality assurance.

The following authors discussed below have made significant contributions to the field of academic governance. They are known for classic works and writings on governance and are worth considering in the pursuit of a conceptual framework for this study (Herek, 1995). They have contributed to different areas and provide us with an overview of the key concepts of academic governance. For the purpose of this study, I focused on Clark (1983), Braun (1999), Birnbaum (1988), Van Vught (1989), and Shattock (2012), as I believe that their contributions have influenced the way I view and understand higher education governance.

Clark (1983) introduces the tripartite structure involved in university governance, namely the state, the market, and the academic project. Braun (1999) provides a useful typology of governance systems, namely collegial, trustee, stakeholder, and market-focused governance (Donaldson & Davis, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989). This typology generates insight into governance as a platform for universities to establish internal and external relationships. Birnbaum (1988) writes extensively about how and why universities can be considered organizations, making a clear case for the need for corporate governance approaches in academic contexts. Van Vught (1989) highlights public service and explains the impact of the governance relationship between the institution and the state. Shattock (2012) introduces a conceptual model containing three points of connection, namely the governing body, the executive, and academic self-governance. Considering these authors and studying their views and perspectives on governance led me to my conceptual map prior to commencing with the research project. This study provides a unique conceptual framework for governance in South African private higher education with wider applicability in the sector.

I believe that these authors capture the foundations of academic governance. They emphasize a number of key aspects that are considered part of the conceptualization of this study, as per the outlines provided in the sections that follow.

5.1 Clark: The triangle of co-ordination

Clark (1983) is viewed a key contributor to governance studies and his work has influenced studies in governance in corporations as well as higher education institutions. His classic publication in 1983 captured the first three-dimensional governance typology, representing the parties that contribute to academic governance: the state, the university, and academics. His work created a sound foundation for the conceptual framework developed for this study, visually representing the key relationships between the role players influencing academic governance, as depicted in Figure 1 below. His three key contributors to academic governance are as follows:

- (a) ***The market***, at the base of the triangle, that is, those served by higher education and how they influence institutions and determine the strategic directions and content covered by governance structures;
- (b) ***The state***, pointing to government regulation and co-ordination beyond funding responsibility in the case of public institutions and in consideration of the influence of the state on institutions; and
- (c) ***Academics***, referring to those involved in the process of knowledge production, the core business of universities.

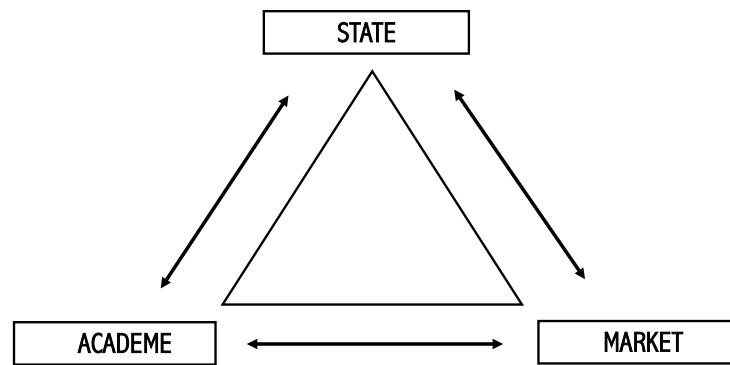


FIGURE 1: Clark's Triangle of Co-ordination (Lang, 2015, n.p.)

All three aspects influence how universities are governed and managed. Furthermore, they create power relationships, for example, between the state and academics, and between what the market requires and what government demands. In later years, as his research evolved and he admitted that the initial governance triangle was no longer relevant, Clark (1997) introduced a fourth category (Vidovich & Currie, 2011). The fourth category, ***the board***, another steering mechanism of the university, was an important addition (especially in the context of academic governance).

Clark's triangle of co-ordination contributed to ideas about the self-reliance of higher education institutions and the increasing need to develop towards independence and entrepreneurship. This contradicted the previous overreliance and focus on state dependency and introduced the idea of additional income streams to ensure increased independence. Clark was also a key influence on the work of Shattock (2003), who continued to build on the triangulation concept.

5.2 Braun: Typologies of governance systems

Another important typology informing ideas about academic governance structures and systems was contributed by Braun (1999). His typology is unique as it not only includes both collegial and corporate governance approaches, as discussed above, but also emphasizes the importance of the involvement of various internal and external stakeholders in academic governance. The typology can be described as follows:

(a) Collegial governance is consistent with shared governance approaches (Baldrige, 1971; Burke, 2010), as discussed above, and considers academics as professionals who are thus best equipped to represent academic matters during governance processes. There is, however, often a lack of interest or time to participate, though there is support for self-regulation and power to be allocated at the faculty level.

(b) Trustee governance refers to the inclusion of external stakeholders in the process of governance in order to ensure the maintenance of the values of the institution the trustees serve and to confirm ethical conduct and involvement from the community beyond the university. Trustee governance implies that the board of trustees (or equivalent structure) holds a high level of power and represents the interests of the institution (ElObeidy, 2014).

(c) Stakeholder or networked governance makes provision for a diverse range of representatives from the community to have a say in the direction the university takes. In this way, the business of the university is shared beyond the institution to ensure communities and not only students benefit. The key idea here is that the university is located in a particular community and is deemed a part of the wider environment.

(d) Market or corporate governance assumes that the university is a corporate entity in which the management team holds executive positions with the primary purpose of ensuring student satisfaction and academic success. Corporate activities such as performance appraisals, quality assurance, codes of conduct, efficiencies, benchmarking, and performance indicators are used in this context. According to Dobbins and Leišyte (2014), this approach is based on the assumption that universities operate as economic enterprises and that power is in the hands of the executives.

Braun's typology covers a broad spectrum of governance approaches, from the most traditional, shared approach to governance to extensive dependence on corporate governance (as also discussed earlier in this chapter).

5.3 Birnbaum: Model of organisational functioning

Birnbaum's model of organizational functioning (1988) brings a fresh perspective that focuses on academic leadership. There are visible overlaps with Braun's typology; however, Birnbaum's is unique in its applicability to academics. Four organizational leadership models are covered, namely the collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical. Birnbaum's model was the conclusion of a five-year long enquiry, undertaken from 1985 to 1989, that studied the university as an organization. It is viewed as one of the most extensive studies of this nature at the time. The models overlap with the previously discussed approaches, as outlined below:

(a) Collegial leadership refers to management by consensus and making decisions collectively rather than individually. This model has found that academics often engage in debate and discussion; however, it can be characterized as often lacking direction and being unable to reach a conclusion.

(b) Bureaucratic leadership refers to managing through processes and structures, with very specific tasks and responsibilities assigned to different parties. This can easily result in overlapping levels of authority which may lead to tension. In an academic environment, this can cause academics to feel disempowered and that they are victims of the bureaucracy (Locke et al., 2011).

(c) Political leadership is characterized by groups that have competing goals due to political influence; personal relationships are often affected, influenced, or abused for political gain and benefit. This type of leadership is born of political pressure and recognizes the presence of political influences in university contexts. As discussed above, universities function within communities and cannot separate themselves from constitutional conflict and political actions (Locke et al., 2011).

(d) Lastly, **anarchical leadership** refers to autonomous academic leadership. This means that academics are placed in positions of power, which can lead to a variety of directions and agendas arising in different disciplines. There is thus a lack of centralized authority and leadership and confusion may result from discipline bias.

The value of Birnbaum's model lies in its recognition of the links between different layers and subsystems in universities and how these connect during governance processes (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). It also highlights the importance of the external political environment, how this impacts on universities, and that academics cannot be completely removed from this. Van Vught (1993) has commended Birnbaum for unpicking the notion of the university as a traditionally stable system and for drawing attention to its numerous conflicting parts.

5.4 Van Vught: Patterns of governance

A key figure who has influenced my thinking about academic governance is Van Vught. He conducted a study on behalf of Unesco in 1993, focusing on the need for innovative governance practices. His work recognizes that the higher education sector is changing, and he highlights the need to consider public administration and policy analysis as point of departure (Van Vught, 1989; Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). Braun (1999) is of the opinion that Van Vught concentrated largely on the role of the state and how this impacts on academic governance. This was refuted by Van Vught (1993): he claims that he views governance from a multi-actor perspective comprising the state, institutional administrators, and academics. He presents two models of state intervention: first, through **control** and, second, through **supervision**. I find this differentiation useful as it considers the role of the state as both beneficial and destructive. His work recognizes that 'governments often try to influence the dynamics of the higher education system, hoping to make it more flexible, adaptive and responsive to societal needs' (Van Vught, 1993, p. 7). He was one of the few authors that gave credit to the state for intervening and steering higher education, and did not only consider it from a funding perspective.

5.5 Shattock: Conceptual model for governance in higher education

I found Shattock's (2012) conceptual model for governance in higher education very useful during the conceptualization phase of this study. In essence, it includes three points of connection in academic governance processes, namely the governing body, the executive, and academic self-governance and participation. It creates a platform for the interrelationship between corporate and academic governance (Wilson & Chapman, 2013a), and is thus applicable to both public and private institutions. In this manner, it makes provision for the more traditional or collegial governance models, as well as the more corporate

approaches required in higher education. Shattock's model (2012) is visually depicted below in Figure 2.

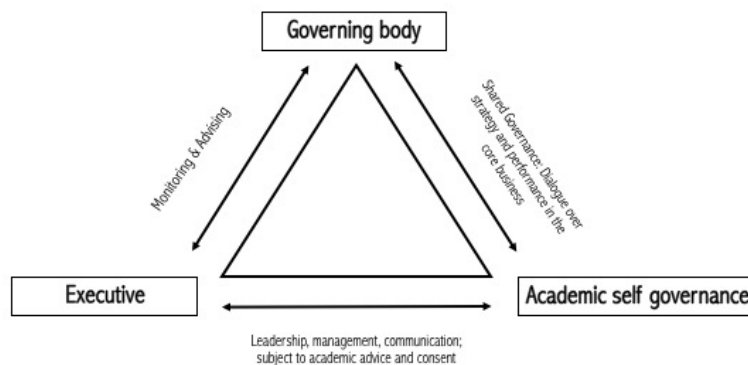


FIGURE 2: Shattock's Conceptual Model for Governance in Higher Education (in Wilson & Chapman, 2013a, p. 3)

Shattock's work resonates with my values and beliefs as a higher education professional, highlighting especially the importance of a balanced approach. He proposes an alternative approach to modern university governance, acknowledging the work of Clark (1983) and recognizing that the failure of one of the elements results in total governance failure. He also acknowledges the uniqueness of the business of the university and the need to apply corporate principles.

He makes provision for the academic project, namely teaching, learning, and research, which constitutes the core business of universities, and how this should be coordinated and managed through the governance framework of the institution in order to ensure sound decisions are made (Shattock, 2006, p. 2). This should also be the case in private higher education and not only public institutions where accountability is required because of state funding. Shattock contemplates the strategic management of institutions, thus ensuring that all the

components of a university are captured in his model. This makes his model more than just a fleeting management fad, as it aims to combine traditional, innovative, and corporate approaches. He encourages high levels of participation and outlines the need for academics to consider their attendance and contributions useful in order for them to make informed decisions on matters they are passionate about.

Another consideration is his attempt to eliminate the layers and levels of tedious and onerous governance structures in order to ensure honest and direct communication, dialogue, and engagement (Shattock, 2014). As a higher education professional observing national and institutional governance, especially in private higher education in South Africa, my view is that this is one of the most neglected aspects this was confirmed in the literature review. Shattock (2012) calls for constructive confrontational situations in which issues are unpicked and discussed, and for the voice of academics to be heard and considered. Furthermore, he is emphasizing the need for short lines of communication to ensure that messages are transmitted effectively and authentically (Shattock, 2012).

In his earlier work, Shattock (2002) recognizes that there are corporate- and academic-dominated forms of governance; he continually attempts to find the middle ground (Shattock, 2002). He supports a balanced approach and a partnership between the corporate and collegial approaches in which the 'sense of common purpose' informs the collaborative relationship (Shattock, 2002, p. 244). He viewed this as the key to success, notwithstanding that the challenges of managing universities in modern times require serious attention to academic, financial, and corporate and professional skills in management structures (Shattock, 1998). The key concepts of Shattock's model (2012) speak to the following:

- The **content** discussed in the course of connecting the components, which can include the vision and mission of the institution, and its governance and strategic framework. Content also includes the sustainability and financial performance of the institution, which are linked to academic performance.
- The **components** of the governance structures (referring to, among others, the executive or management, the governing board or board of directors, and the academics). This factor concerns the presence, role, and participation levels of these components (Schwartz, Skinner & Bowen, 2009).
- The points of **connection** concern the sense of shared governance and how the components relate and critically engage with one another (Boyd, 2009; Shapiro, 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). These connections can include providing advice, monitoring progress, providing leadership or management, mere participation, accountability, decision-making, and reporting, among others.

This section of the chapter has provided an overview of what are considered the key governance models and approaches outlined in the literature. It included various governance approaches and models and highlighted the work of key authors. The next section explores research conducted in the field of governance in higher education, focusing on research undertaken in South Africa.

5.6 Governance codes and guidelines

An overview was provided of what was considered key governance models and approaches outlined in the literature. This included shared governance, collegial governance and the work of key authors such as Van Vught, Birnbaum and Braun.

In addition to the above, various governments, quality agencies and funding bodies published guidelines, principles and codes related to higher education governance. It should be noted that these were not included in the scope of this research project. It should be recognized that these documents and frameworks provide useful resources to institutions to formalize and develop their governance structures. Many of them are not prescriptive in nature, but rather applicable across disciplines and available as best practice models.

6. Overview of existing research

6.1 Research on governance in higher education

Research in the field of higher education and academic governance cannot be properly considered without recognizing the ground-breaking work of Moodie and Eustace (1974). Their work is viewed as the first full-length text on university governance. According to Shattock (2006, p. xii), the content was adjusted and refined in subsequent editions, though it continued to serve as a sound knowledge base, particularly for how research in this field evolved. Kezar and Eckel (2004) express the view that there has been minimal scholarship on governance recently. Scholarly work principally focuses on sub-units of analysis, for example, student governance matters, the efficiency of governing boards and senates, academic involvement in governance, and the like, rather than addressing the concept as a whole. A further limitation of current work is provided by Ferlie, Musselin and Andersani (2008), who indicate that most of the research conducted on governance is dominated by the relationship between universities and the state, and does not address academic governance. There are consistent views about the need for further work in this area to ensure in-depth coverage of governance practices (Bastedo, 2004; Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

The literature contains some descriptive studies of higher education governance which mostly outline different governance arrangements. Thus, there are some case studies indicating the current state of governance in a particular institution. These studies are mostly qualitative in nature, and I could only find a limited number of quantitative studies, some of them with the purpose of determining the impact of governance on the organization or institution (Knott & Payne, 2003). In the qualitative studies, interviews are generally deemed the most suitable method of data collection for investigating governance arrangements and increasing understanding of issues relating to governance (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kezar, 2001; Seidman, 2006). The preferred method of data collection in this study is thus aligned with these. This, however, leads to a limited scope and a 'snapshot' of the state of governance at an institution, and are not easily generalizable to the broader sector and other institutions.

The studies also tend to describe dysfunctional governance practices and to provide examples of governance failures, and do not always provide useful solutions or suggestions for improvement or best practice. In some cases, comparative studies are conducted to identify similarities and differences between institutional governance structures (Lazaretti & Tavoletti, 2006). The findings of these studies are aimed at improving governance practices (Bótas & Huisman, 2012); however, they are highly contextual and again not always transferable or generalizable. A few years ago, Sultana (2012) was of the view that scholarly research at the time was not sufficiently addressing the numerous issues related to higher education governance and was quite limited in scope. It is also evident that research on governance is less frequently conducted in the higher education sectors of developing nations. This is identified by Van Vught (1993) as an area in dire need for further research.

Considering the research conducted in the area of governance, it seems that the focus is constantly changing; however, there are a number of studies outlining the

relationship between higher education institutions and the state and how this impacts on institutional governance and management (e.g. Ferlie et al., 2008; Knott & Payne, 2003). This is not to dismiss the need for research relating to state involvement in governance, as it remains the principal funding agency in the case of public institutions. However, it results in the studies applicable to the public sector emphasizing increases in state control (Hall & Symes, 2005). Bótas and Huisman (2012) postulate that such studies are indicative of how governments use (and abuse) their mandate to influence and shape governance in higher education. It is thus clear from the research that governance structures in higher education reflect the sentiments, beliefs, and directions of the government of the country (Braun, 1999).

In addition to state interference, various studies indicate how the political context impacts on higher education (Hénard & Mitterle, 2009). It is clear from the research that political turmoil spills over into universities as they are often beacons of society and do not function in isolation. This is confirmed by Kezar and Eckel (2004) who indicate that political agendas are easily absorbed into institutional governance structures, and that these agendas are in many cases determined by political leaders. Knott and Payne (2003) assert that uncertain political situations are often reflected in university strategies and in power struggles in institutions. They are of the view that governance structures cannot exist without, even if only partially, reflecting political struggles.

The role of academics in governance is covered extensively in the literature. Such studies address issues relating to the need for their involvement and participation in governance, or the lack thereof, as well as the role they play in decision-making. Institutions are criticized when academics are excluded, and it is understandable considering the rising number of part-time academic staff (Tierney, 2004). The studies also highlight the challenge institutions face in balancing academic involvement and participation with managing perceptions of power and attention

to teaching and research (Locke et al., 2011). Academics are also notorious for opposing governance, but the research reflects progressive thinking in institutions to ensure academic involvement, such as remote attendance and meeting efficiency. Burgan (as cited in Tierney, 2004) also presents the adverse views of faculty regarding university management practices and the challenges this poses to managers and leaders. As much as progress is evident in this area, academics still experience decision-making as top-down and not collegial, and they feel that they do not play a significant role in decision-making (Locke et al., 2011).

Some research studies deal with the levels of governance (Locke et al., 2011). Azman, Jantan and Sirat (as cited in Locke et al., 2011) are of the opinion that there are usually three levels of governance in the higher education hierarchy, namely the institutional, faculty, and departmental levels. Change at one level will affect the other levels, and it is clear from the research that governance practices at the various levels vary significantly based on the institutional culture, structure, and approach to governance (Knott & Payne, 2003).

In addition to levels, governance structures have also been researched. These include councils, governing boards, senates, academic boards, among others, which can be academic, administrative, or corporate in nature. Wilson and Chapman (2013b) postulate that the various structures within institutions should have a common understanding of the goals and collectively work towards these. These structures can vary from permanent to purpose-driven. The academic board (or equivalent) structure is well covered in the literature. These boards are usually formally constituted, often with documented rules and constitutions, terms of reference, membership, and frequency of meetings. Academic boards are also often perceived to be lacking in engagement and not to be consultative, transparent, and participative (Meyer, 2007). This is concerning as the academic board is in many cases the highest level of decision-making for academic matters and is the body responsible for policy development and implementation. It is thus

clear from the research that academic boards do not always function optimally. Rowlands (2013) specifically considers the effectiveness of academic boards to ensure their role in building academic credibility.

Wilson and Chapman (2013b) assert that the academic board should be the pinnacle of academic governance and hence reflective of the institution's reputation. This does not correlate with the actual experiences of academic boards, which may include endless discussions, rubber-stamping, or 'mechanisms of procrastination and obstruction by vested interests who wish to prevent developments' (Jarred, as cited in Shattock, 2012, p. 58). There are also findings relating to these structures often being too large, dealing with too much detail, overlapping with other governance structures, and having an onerous agenda. Most concerning is the perceived lack of academic leadership and strategic thinking. Rowlands (2013) also finds that academic boards are often viewed as not fulfilling their academic quality assurance responsibilities.

It is clear from the above that various aspects of academic governance are covered in the literature. The broad areas of governance levels, structures, representation, and membership are generally well researched; however, there is a clear need for more specific studies focusing on best practice. This requires a range of qualitative studies in order to enable progression from structural matters to impact studies that result in true quality improvement through sound institutional and academic governance (Baird, 2007; Brennan & Solomon, 2008). Studies are dominated by issues related to participation, or the lack thereof, and there is a need for in-depth analysis of matters discussed in governance structures, that is, the content of the discussions (Meyer, 2007). The focus of this research now shifts to research conducted in the South African higher education context.

6.2 Research on governance in South African higher education

Research on governance in the South African higher education is limited and thus does not provide sufficient insight into the state of higher education governance (CHE, 2016). A key piece of research conducted by Hall and Symes (2005) considers the political restructuring of South African higher education through a governance lens. They advocate co-operative governance, but also recognize the role of the South African government as the head of the higher education governance system (Hall & Symes, 2005). They weigh up the contradiction between the fact of institutions receiving public funds and still wanting to pursue academic freedom, thus obtaining a balance between internal and external governance. A few years before that, Morrow (1998) considered higher education governance by senates, and found it to be appropriate based on the principles of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1994). This theory makes provision for stakeholder representation on senate structures. Research has also been limited to historically privileged institutions and thus does not cover the full spectrum of public institutions, let alone the private higher education sector as a whole (CHE, 2016). Research dealing with private higher education has been largely dominated by studies dealing with the presence of company-type board structures, rather than with academic governance and the content covered in existing governance structures (De Boer et al., 2010).

It is not unexpected that the political unrest has played a significant role in shaping the South African landscape and this is reflected in the content of the research (Barac & Marx, 2012). It reveals not only political struggles, but also glaring socio-cultural inequities built on a long legacy of apartheid, which continues to have a significant impact on higher education institutions even after more than two decades of democracy. This also prompts questions about the ability of governance structures to cope with very difficult decisions. According to Kulati (2000) and Jacobs (2016), institutions in South Africa are continuously

confronted with unique circumstances, such as violent student protests, destruction of property, criminal activity, and clashes between staff, students, and national authorities. This highlights the importance of responsive governance and agile consultation processes (Acharya, 2015). There is also a need for further research on how the above mentioned current events will impact on institutional governance and student participation in future.

Various studies have covered aspects of leadership, which is related to governance. Kulati (2003) researched leadership approaches during times of extensive policy changes. The focus of the study is on the changing role of institutional leaders and how they cope with political changes. The study calls for managerial and entrepreneurial approaches to leadership. Research on leadership during times of crisis was also conducted by Cloete and Bunting (1999). They provide a classification of institutional governance and management in terms of which they distinguish between transformative, managerial, and crisis leadership. These studies speak of the volatile South African context and the need for leadership and governance during times of turmoil. Related studies conducted on issues of race and language difficulties faced by governance structures find that these factors often impact on the quality of outcomes as the content and level of engagement is influenced (Adams, 2013).

For a number of years, the South African higher education landscape was dominated by the aftermath of forced institutional mergers. A study was commissioned that describes 12 institutional governance case studies in the course of merger transitions (Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004). It was not surprising that the findings reflected the tension, stress, and conflict experienced during the mergers, which impacted on the sector, institutions, and individuals (Adams, 2006). These tensions also filtered through to governance structures and discussions were often sidetracked as a result. It would be interesting to conduct comparative studies now to determine the longer term impact of the forced

arrangements not only on the sector, but also at the institutional level (Safavi & Håkanson, 2016).

Following the 1994 national election, a concerted effort was made by the government to assist South African institutions during the transition to the new democratic political dispensation (CHE, 2004; CHE, 2006). The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996) was established to make recommendations and co-operative governance was found to be most suitable approach. Even though all the stakeholders agreed on this approach, it was not possible for it to be seamlessly applied to the sector. More recently, Barac and Marx (2012) have supported a corporate governance approach due to the accountability and transparency requirements it entails. They conducted a literature review and considered the annual reports of institutions in South Africa, finding a lack of detail and description of governance practices and structures. The political changes made at the time might have influenced the findings, which demonstrates the gaps in research regarding recommended governance approaches in the South African context.

A significant study considers how South African academics respond to governance (Thaver, 2010). It deals with the recruitment, appointment, and promotion of academics, and how these processes are managed by institutional governance structures. Wolhuter, Higgs, Higgs and Ntshoe (as cited in Locke et al., 2011) also reviewed the level of engagement of academics in institutional governance. The study highlights that South African academics have experienced more change than anywhere else in the world. The findings reveal that academics largely view management as incompetent and non-supportive of the academic project. Habib (2016) concludes that institutions in South Africa remain exposed to the political impact of dispensations before and after 1994.

It has been established that the South African government is generally supportive of private higher education institutions; however, there is limited research and literature dealing with governance in this sector. There is a view that governance structures in public institutions have evolved to some extent, but that there is generally a lack of capacity to advance these debates to include the private sector (Hall et al., 2004).

7. A researcher's conceptual framework for governance in higher education

Earlier in the chapter, I explained the difference between a theoretical and conceptual framework. I have also indicated that I believe this study is located within the theoretical framework of management theory. In the course of the literature review I came across key aspects and concepts relating to governance, in both corporate companies and academic environments. I developed a conceptual framework depicting the aspects and the relationship between them. The process of development of the conceptual framework was undertaken in two stages or iterations, starting with the work of Shattock. The framework was then further evolved into a visual representation that has served as a useful tool to organize and structure my ideas.

The importance of defining a conceptual framework is to demonstrate my understanding as a researcher of the theories that serve as the foundation of the study and as a roadmap or frame of reference at the different stages of the study. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) identify three elements that were considered during the development of the conceptual framework. These are highlighted below.

First, the conceptual framework outlines the concepts that are of personal interest and importance to me as the researcher and are influenced by my own professional practice and experience. I have been interested and involved in the research and can personally relate to the framework.

Second, it is informed by topical research on the subject of governance. The framework is influenced by a number of theories and by the work of key authors in the areas of governance and higher education governance. The literature review confirms the lack of a suitable existing framework. The conceptual framework I developed can be used by institutions and adjusted to be applicable to different contexts. Thus, the framework confirms the arguments and assists in advancing what has already been published on the topic by Berman (2013).

Lastly, the conceptual framework includes references to the relevant theoretical foundations and origins identified in the scholarly literature that is aligned with my research problem and purpose. The framework is also used to present my findings and conclusions. Key concepts from the various theories are embedded within the conceptual framework. This also leads to the practical outcome of the study, that is, the contribution to the professional context. My aim is for the framework to provide guidance to institutions to improve governance practices, thus potentially serving a broader purpose. It provides a framework for the research process, moving from key concepts to the research themes and questions, and then to the methodology and analysis of the data and findings (Berman, 2013).

As mentioned above, the conceptual framework was developed in two stages. Thus, two iterations are presented below. The first is a table containing aspects and key elements of governance in higher education, primarily based on the work of Shattock (2012), which I viewed at the time as a major contribution to academic governance. The second iteration evolved into a pictorial depiction that helped to advance my thinking. It also provides opportunities to demonstrate the connection between different concepts, which I was not able to present adequately in the first iteration. I believe the two iterations are good indicators of my understanding of the theoretical framework.

7.1 First iteration of the conceptual model

As mentioned above, this conceptual model was contextualized to ensure suitability to higher education, specifically the South African private higher education sector. It is, however, applicable to different contexts and countries. The two iterations of the conceptual model are used to interrogate and evaluate governance practices and processes in private higher education institutions by considering key aspects originated from the literature. The work of Shattock (2012) was used as the point of departure for the first iteration. This was further defined and refined as I progressed through the research process, leading to the second iteration. It provides both background and meaning to the field of governance, which are to be considered when it is implemented in a unique and challenged higher education context.

The first iteration is presented in Table 1 below and consists of three main elements (adapted from Shattock, 2012), namely **content** (the substance of what should be covered during governance engagements), **components** (those participating in governance), and, lastly, **connection** (the points of connection between internal and external governance).

<u>Conceptual Framework for Governance in Private Higher Education in South Africa</u>			
Adapted from Shattock (2012)			
CONTENT	Strategic	Operational	Financial
	Vision and mission Planning (long / short term) Quality (fitness of purpose) Core business	Policies / Procedures Implementation Support structures Student experience	Budgeting / Resources Monitoring Expenditure review External funding
COMPONENTS	Presence	Role	Participation
	Governing Board / Directors Executive / Management Academics Professional / Administrative Unionization	Terms of Reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented • Clearly articulated • Understood Frequency of meetings	Membership Student representation External involvement Attendance Departmental representation
CONNECTION	Accountability	Internal reporting	External reporting
	Protocol / Chairing Decision-making power Advisory Participatory	Reporting line Interdepartmental Between committees	Quality assurance Regulatory Governmental / Statutory requirements

TABLE 1: First Iteration of a Conceptual Framework for Governance in Private Higher Education in South Africa

(a) Content

The **content** discussed during governance engagements relates to the substance of what is prioritized and is being considered. This can include strategic, operational, and financial matters though it differs at the various levels of governance. This confirms that there is a need for engagement on higher level strategic matters (Mortensen, 2009) and presupposes a vision, mission, and value proposition to inform the content (Armstrong, 2014). Traditionally, universities often do not have very specific mission statements and objectives; these are becoming increasingly difficult to formulate in times of continuous change (Bitzer, 2009). They impact on governance, as they do not provide clear direction to inform the content. Content discussed in governance structures often tends to switch between strategic and operational matters, where strategic interference affects operational levels, and vice versa (HESA, 2012). The core content of governance proceedings differs from institution to institution (Armstrong, 2014). Mortensen (2009) confirms that there is a visible shift in institutions to prioritizing the student experience, thus moving the focus away from external stakeholders, researchers, funding agencies, and the like, to a more internal focus. The aim for institutions should be to produce a balanced and focused representation of what is contained in the vision and mission of the institution.

(b) Components

Governance structures consist of various **components**, that is, people who represent various parts of the institution. It is important to ensure that the relevant components participate in the correct structures. This requires a good understanding of who the key stakeholders are in order to ensure that there is sufficient internal and external representation. The levels of representation need to clearly outline the relationship between the different parties to ensure that the status of those present is clearly understood, for instance, as having membership

and voting rights as opposed to observer status. This is another point of differentiation between public and private institutions – the roles of councils, boards, and management are different (HESA, 2012). Conflicts of interest and whether all stakeholders are represented should be addressed, which often requires training as there is not always clarity regarding what it means to represent a particular sector. The governance framework, levels of governance, governance structures, terms of reference, and institutional governance rules should be concisely outlined and available to ensure transparency and evidence of representation.

(c) Connection

Governance structures create points of **connection**. A key consideration when measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of governance is whether the points of connection serve their purpose and represent real engagement. This requires skilled chairpersons as the ability to accurately manage these points of connection is often underestimated. The role of the chair is to ensure that constructive discussions take place, that quality documentation is provided, and that decisions are sufficiently discussed, finalized and documented for future evidence and document trails. HESA (2012) outlines the skills required by the chair and the levels of experience and competence required to ensure quality connections, such as communication skills and the ability to draw matters to conclusion while serving the interest of all the stakeholders involved. This is a very specific skill – academics and administrators should be able to take control of meetings, follow meeting procedures and protocol, and, most importantly, display objective and unbiased leadership (Sall & Oanda, 2015).

The levels of accountability entail knowledge of the escalation and appeals procedures and when an ombudsman is required (HESA, 2012). There is an increasing interest from various stakeholders in governance proceedings; this

should be made available, when appropriate, to ensure transparency (Locke et al., 2011). There should also be increased levels of accountability through programme accreditation systems and institutional audits, amongst other quality assurance measures implemented (Fourie, as cited in Bitzer, 2009). The connections created by internal governance serve as evidence during these external processes. Another aspect that should be considered during all points of connection and engagement is quality assurance and the measurement of quality. This is often neglected and overshadowed by operational matters and politically infused meetings (Mortensen, 2009).

The matters discussed above provide an overview of the first iteration of the conceptual model, which was the initial frame of reference that influenced the formulation of the interview questions and engagement with the documents related to governance that were obtained from institutions.

7.2 Second iteration of the conceptual model

The second iteration of the conceptual framework evolved in terms of format. This allowed me to more accurately represent the connections between the various aspects of governance and the relationship between the key concepts of governing, government, and governance. It indicates the various levels of governance in an institution, as well as the balance required between academic and corporate governance. This iteration contains the key ideas from the first iteration, namely the concepts relating to governance as derived from other key authors, further strengthening the ideas presented by Shattock (2012). It clearly establishes the basis for addressing the research problem, leading to the answers to the research questions. The questions are based on the main elements of the framework in order to ensure that all the concepts are covered in both the document analysis and interview data collection phases. Responses to the interview questions and the document analysis could then be assessed in relation

to the framework, which is used to present the conclusions and findings. The themes and categories are constructed on the basis of repeated and related ideas and aspects contained in the framework (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid & Redwood, 2013). The second iteration is an indication of my thinking evolving and continuous engagement with the data and the research.

It is clear from this iteration that there is a need for a balance between corporate and academic governance. The conceptual model recognizes the fact that these elements would be expected in a private higher education context. Furthermore, the model differentiates between internal and external governance. Internal governance is managed within institutions and facilitated by the management and leadership teams, engaging with academics and administrative staff. The model highlights that internal governance should include students as key stakeholders during this internal engagement process. External governance on the other hand involves the state, the regulators and more broadly, the market and industry involvement in the work and content of the institution. The model provides for reporting mechanisms between the internal governance structures, and also between the institution and the external governance structures. This is what constitutes the content of governance. The content varies in nature and can stretch from the basic, operational discussions to high level strategic engagements with external stakeholders. The content should also include academic discussions, as well as the formulation, implementation and review of policies and procedures.

The model is not prescriptive in terms of governance structures, but rather represent what should be accounted for in an ideal governance framework. Most importantly is the ultimate goal of governance being represented at the top of the triangle, namely institutional performance and success. The purpose of governance engagements should be working towards continuous improvement and to ensure that the institution is moving forward and achieving goals. This

iteration thus represents the core elements as presented in the first iteration, namely creating points of connection, including all the essential components of the institution and the content of the governance engagement. This creates the basis for the ideal state of governance, which is supported by the linkage between governance, governing and the government. The different levels of governance are represented, namely departmental, faculty and institutional levels.

The framework can also be used to achieve one of the main outcomes of providing useful guidelines that can be used by private (and possibly other) institutions to improve governance structures and practices. It can serve as a blueprint for institutions to analyze their current governance practices and to consider how they wish to make adjustments in the future. The second iteration of the conceptual framework is outlined in Figure 3 below.

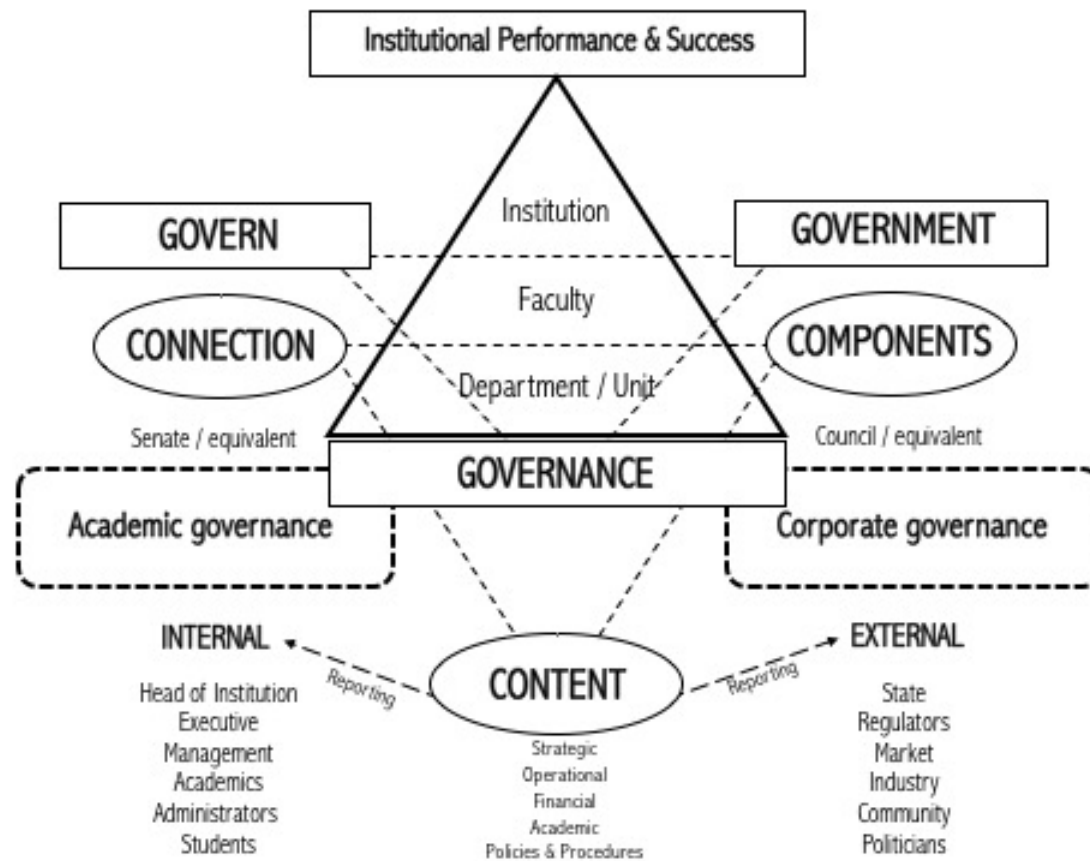


FIGURE 3: Second Iteration of Conceptual Framework for Governance in Private Higher Education in South Africa: The Ideal State

8. Conclusion

This chapter has considered various theories and the theoretical origins of governance, as represented in management theory. It has outlined the foundations of governance within management theory in the literature, with reference to different governance approaches and models and their application in higher education. These theories and guidelines contributed to thinking and theorizing about governance in education and higher education. It is clear from the above literature review that various properties are deemed applicable and relevant to higher education. The chapter demonstrated that theories are not stagnant and that continual rethinking refines and solidifies theoretical groundings. Governance as a field and discipline is growing and changing as the context of higher education changes and complexities arise.

This chapter has also provided an overview of research previously conducted on governance in higher education, including studies specifically related to the South African higher education landscape. It has clearly shown the limited number of studies dealing with or even mentioning the private higher education context. Two iterations of conceptual frameworks for higher education governance, which serve as the basis for study, have been presented. The conceptual frameworks incorporate my ideas following the completion of the literature review. The two iterations of the conceptual models are used in the data collection and analysis phases of the study, as well as to present the findings towards the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3 Methodology

1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design that is used to describe the lived experiences of private higher education practitioners in South Africa as these relate to the state of governance at their institutions. The rationale for the selection of the research method is discussed. This includes an overview of the IPA approach and its roots in phenomenology. Consideration is given to the formulation of the research questions, and how these are used to inform the study protocol, interview questions, and my role as researcher. Subsequently, the data collection and analysis procedures are described. The next section highlights how the credibility and transferability of the findings were assured and the chapter concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations.

2. Rationale for the qualitative research design

As humans we all have unique views the world and our experiences are all different. Even if we are in the same location, exposed to the same reality or event, our experiences remain distinctive as they are lived by us as individuals. We all represent different perspectives, take different positions, and come to different conclusions about the same event or phenomenon. Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012) explain that reality is contextual, socially constructed, and thus created by individuals. This also applies to us as researchers and the things or phenomena we investigate. As researchers, we take a philosophical position that serves as our frame of reference when we conduct research. We study problems, events, or phenomena through this lens which then informs our understanding of the world and what happens in the world (Maxwell, 2005; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This provides a foundation and structure for our research, and, in this manner, we make

unique contributions to knowledge and make meaning of the world (Egbert & Sanden, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kuhn, 1962; Henning, 2004).

Our research paradigms consist of various components or assumptions. The first component is our ontological orientation, that is, how we view the nature of reality (Bryman, 2008; Leedy, 1974). On the one hand, we can view reality as objective (objectivist) – thus reality exists outside of us and we view it as outsiders. On the other hand, we can view reality as constructive (constructivist) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This means that social situations are continuously changing and are influenced by various factors – it is thus a work in progress or is continuously being constructed. The researcher's ontological positioning informs the purpose of the research and how the data will be collected, used, interpreted, and presented (Patton, 2002; Schram, 2006). This study is conducted from a constructivist perspective, meaning that governance practices are seen as in context, in this case, that of higher education institutions, and they are constructed and experienced by those working at these institutions and participating in governance activities.

The next component that constitutes the research paradigm is our epistemological orientation. Epistemology is derived from the Greek word *episteme*, which refers to knowledge or 'how we come to know' (Carter & Little, 2007; Henning, 2004, p. 15). A researcher can be epistemologically oriented towards positivism or interpretivism (Bryman, 2001; Schram, 2006). Positivism is located within the natural sciences discipline in which the researcher independently gathers knowledge. The purpose of such studies is to remain objective and the research goal is to demonstrate causality, which occurs by mean of quantitative research. On the other hand, interpretivism provides for interpreting human action, which means that we aim to understand human behaviour (Petty et al., 2012). This research project follows an interpretivist, constructivist paradigm (Bryman, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which supports the

view that there is not a single reality or truth that requires interpretation; rather, reality is constructed and interpreted by individuals. The purpose of this research study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how governance practices are experienced by practitioners in private higher education in South Africa.

Within this inductive paradigm, IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) is used as the methodological framework. Burrell and Morgan (as cited in Alase, 2017) indicates that IPA is suitable and compatible with the interpretivist paradigm. It allows the necessary flexibility that looks beyond the experiences of individuals, though it includes the interpretation of the experiences by the individuals and the researcher. IPA studies may in some instances involve closely examining the experiences of only one participant as it requires the researcher to be immersed in the experiences of the participants. Emphasis is thus placed on the quality of engagement with the experiences of a few individuals rather than on more superficial engagement with many participants. In the case of this study, a small number of participants provided their accounts. The participants were invited to participate on the basis of their knowledge and involvement with the phenomenon being considered. They were deemed able to provide meaningful insight into the topic (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). A total of 10 participants shared their experiences of the governance practices at their own institutions (see Table 2).

To fully understand IPA, we have to consider its theoretical origin in phenomenology. IPA originated within the field of psychology, where it aimed to offer insight into the experiences of patients and how they make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Finlay, 2014). IPA is thus phenomenological as it relates to personal perceptions and experiences of an event or state, as opposed to describing the phenomenon objectively. Eatough and Smith (2008) explain that IPA can be traced back to Husserl's work on constructing consciousness, as well

as to hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. It is thus a combination of studying experiences and interpreting the accounts relayed by the participants.

2.1 Phenomenology

Husserl is considered the father of phenomenology, a discipline with roots in philosophy and psychology that poses questions about the structure and essence of a phenomenon (Husserl, as cited in Kockelmans, 1994). It postulates that every experience is embedded in the 'lifeworld' of the participant, which is continuously changing and should be viewed in context (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 120; Schram, 2006, p. 71; Schram, 2003, p. 70). Phenomenological researchers aim to gain understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon through engagement with people exposed to the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A phenomenon is considered in its natural setting; Zeegers and Barron (2015, p. 16) describe phenomenology as being interested in 'lived experiences' in these settings.

The main phenomenological theorists are Van Manen (1990), Moustakas (1994), and, in the early 1970s, Giorgi and Wertz (Alase, 2017; Finlay, 2014). These theorists highlight the different nuances of phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990) outlines the idea that our most basic experiences are already meaningful, and are thus already influenced by what we have lived and experienced up to that point. Psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) deals with humans attaching meaning to external experiences and responding to these in a therapeutic environment. Riemen's contribution (as cited in Creswell, 2015), was mainly in the medical field; he introduced the concept of meaning statements to be attached to patients to ensure their conditions are described as they experience them and not merely as observed by others (Creswell, 2015). Lastly, Giorgi and Wertz (Alase, 2017) introduced the division between descriptive and interpretative approaches in phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology relates to the use of imaginative variations to ensure

that the essence of a phenomenon is captured through these different angles; whereas interpretative phenomenology is more focused on interpretations of the core of a phenomenon.

The theory and concept of phenomenology was revolutionized by Smith et al. (2009) who introduced IPA, which is becoming increasingly popular in modern practice (Alase, 2017). These authors were responsible for establishing this new phenomenological framework that is connected to the core ideas of the phenomenological philosophers outlined in the previous section (Smith et al., 2009). IPA follows an interpretative and analytical approach (Alase, 2017) and is used to explore an area of concern in a systemic, flexible, multidirectional, and analytical way (Finlay, 2014). IPA studies focus on how individuals attach meaning to their experiences by sharing their innermost reflections on the process of attaching meaning (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This is consistent with my understanding of traditional phenomenological approaches. It is clearly participant-oriented and demands respect for and sensitivity to those going through the process of making sense of their own experiences (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009).

In the case of this study, detailed analysis was undertaken of the descriptive accounts of governance activities obtained from practitioners in private higher education institutions in South Africa. Using this methodology, the researcher facilitates the process of 'systematically and attentively reflecting on every lived experience' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). It is a descriptive method that includes a layer of interpretation of what was said. In phenomenology, the most common method of data collection is interviews; in this study, this was supplemented by document analysis which assisted in the course of the interpretation phase. This is clearly aligned with the two-stage interpretative process or double hermeneutics (Smith, 2007) of IPA – the meaning first relayed by the participants themselves and then interpreted by the researcher.

2.2 Linking IPA to the research questions

IPA was conceptualized in the mid-1990s and, as described above, is used to gain an understanding of psychological problems (Smith et al., 2009). It then became popular in other fields, such as education, sociology, psychology, and economics, among others (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). According to Smith and Osborn (as cited in Smith, 2007), the main activity of an IPA research study involves gaining an objective understanding of particular experiences. IPA ensures that we are receptive to and interested in the particular phenomenon from the personal perspective of those living it, and not only from our own frame of reference or as affected by our own ideas or views (Finlay, 2014). Governance in private higher education is a complex phenomenon that I am passionate about; according to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), no phenomenon should be left uninterpreted.

There are various examples of IPA applied to the field of education. For example, Holland (2014) conducted an IPA study that considers the experiences of 13 language teachers of their work relationships, workload, and perceptions of management support for teaching activities. IPA has also been used to analyze student experiences (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). An example is the study by Denovan and Macaskill (2013), which considers the transition experience of 10 first-year students. Another good example is that of Wood, Farmer and Goodall (2015), who conducted an IPA study of the phenomenon of the professional identity of new lecturers in different disciplines in higher education. These studies are examples of how IPA is suitable for studying the lived experiences of both academic staff and students. It is thus also deemed suitable for studying the experiences of governance practices by non-academic staff working in higher education environments. IPA allows for both the participants and me as the

researcher to arrive at a co-constructed understanding of the experiences by means of dialogue, allowing for interpretation of different points of view.

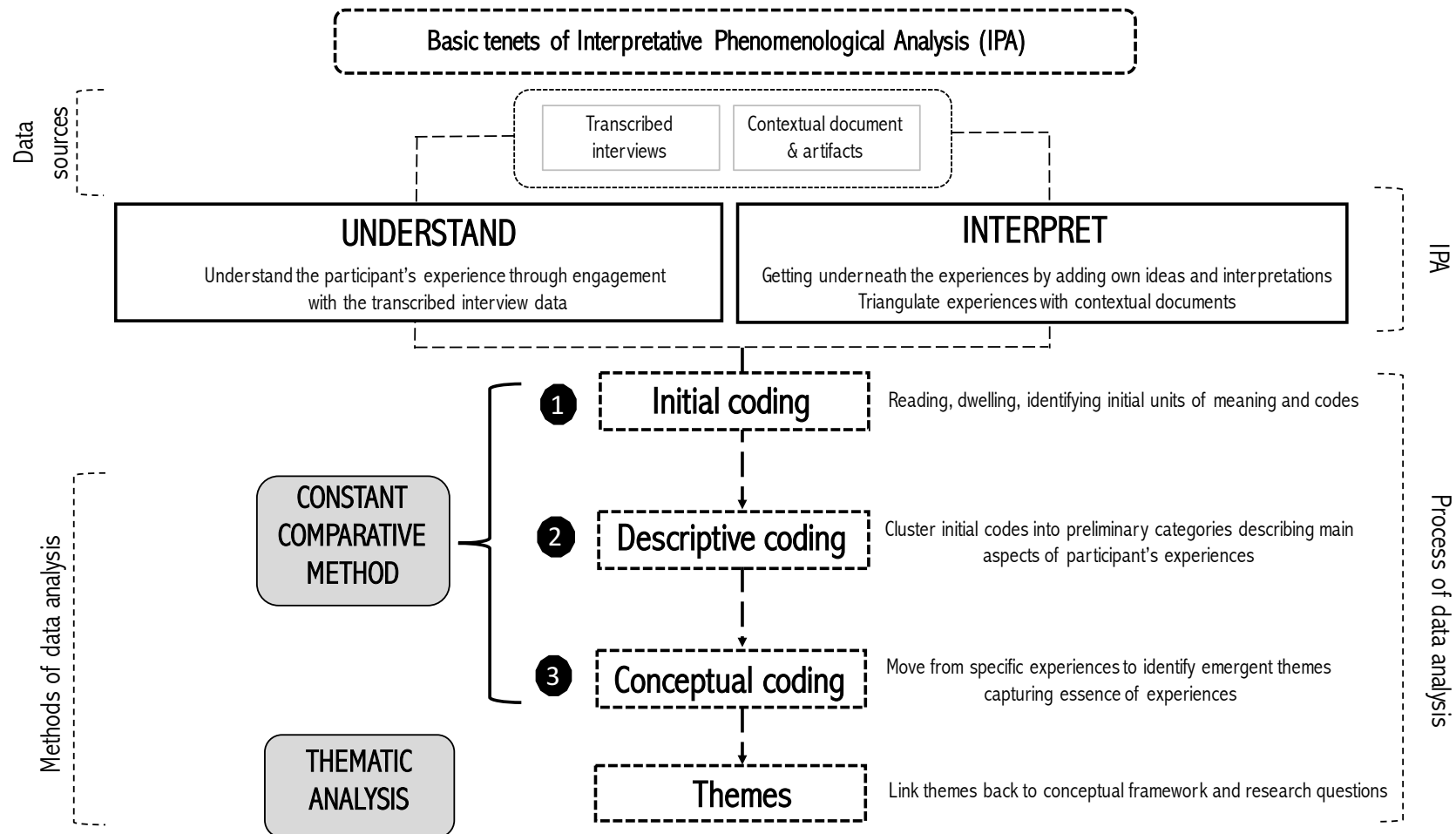


FIGURE 4: Basic Tenets of IPA

The basic tenets of IPA are depicted in Figure 4, which outlines the following:

- (a) The ***sources of data*** used in this study, namely interviews and documents or artefacts;
- (b) The main ***phases and purpose of the analysis***, namely gaining an understanding of experiences and interpretation;
- (c) The ***methods of data analysis***, namely the constant comparative method of data analysis and thematic analysis; and
- (d) The ***process of data analysis***, which moves from initial coding to descriptive coding, and then to conceptual coding before eventually deriving themes (Basiit, 2003).

The sections that follow discuss the aspects captured in Figure 4, as applied to this particular study, in order to answer the research questions. The main research question is appropriate for IPA, namely: *What are the experiences of practitioners involved in governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa?*

The main research question is supplemented with three sub-questions:

- *How do practitioners describe governance models or approaches at their institutions?*
- *How do they experience the balance between corporate and academic governance requirements?*
- *How do they experience the impact of contextual challenges to governance structures and practices?*

The literature review and research questions assisted with the planning and execution of the research design within an IPA framework. The questions are formulated to ensure that they generate the information required to fulfill the purpose of the research project, namely to gain a deeper understanding of

governance practices in private higher education institutions (Trede & Higgs, as cited in Alase, 2017).

3. Selection of participants / Sampling

The first step in the data collection process was to identify suitable data sources and participants (Mason, 2002). In the case of this study, the methods of data collection are interviews and document analysis. Potential interview participants included all practitioners in private higher education in South Africa with some level of responsibility for managing or administering governance processes and procedures at their institutions and experience governance practices first-hand and on a daily basis. The second step was the process of identifying and locating publicly available documents and artifacts containing information and evidence of governance practices at the participating institutions. The document analysis process is discussed later in this chapter.

I embarked on a sampling and selection process to ensure that participants were willing and able to contribute significantly to the purpose of the research by sharing their experiences of governance practices at their institution. As mentioned above, IPA is participant-oriented and each account or experience shared by the participants is valued (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It is thus critical to ensure that the correct participants are selected and recruited as their experiences are the primary source of data.

I had to consider the correct sample size. There are various suggestions in the literature regarding the appropriate sample size for IPA studies. Polkinghorne (as cited in Alase, 2017) suggests that interviews should be conducted with between 5 and 10 participants who have experienced the same phenomenon to ensure that commonalities and differences can be captured. Smith (2007) recommend a sample size of 5 or 6 participants, and make it clear that a small number of

participants is acceptable. Alase (2017) is more liberal in his proposition, indicating that a sample size in IPA can range from 2 to 25 participants, depending on availability, exposure to, and the nature of the phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, 10 practitioners were purposefully sampled. Purposive sampling as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), aims at ensuring that the selected participants are able to provide insight into their experiences. It was also important to confirm whether the research questions and phenomenon being studied are significant and important to the participants (Smith, 2007). This was determined through informal conversations as well as by using the participant consent form (Annexure 3).

Even though representation is not the main consideration in IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), it was useful to ensure that the scope and diversity of the private higher education sector were broadly represented by the selected participants. Ten participants from the spectrum of legitimate private higher education institutions in South Africa were sampled to participate in the semi-structured interviews and related documents were also obtained (Zeegers & Barron, 2015), as outlined in the table below. There are unfortunately a number of illegal providers operating in the South African environment, not holding the relevant accreditation as providers or the necessary course approvals. Thus, the study focused on institutions listed in the register of accredited providers, as issued by the national authorities.

Participants were selected considering the following criteria:

- All institutions represented in the sample were legitimate and registered with the national authorities;
- The size (number of students) and scope (number of course offerings) of the institution;
- The sites of delivery or number of campuses;

- Whether the institutions were niche providers (specialising in a particular discipline, or a limited number of disciplines) or broad-based providers (offering courses in a wide range of disciplines);
- The category of the role held by the participants, for example, senior executive, senior manager or manager;
- The particular roles and responsibilities related to governance; and
- Lastly, an indication of their willingness to share their experiences as part of the research project (Curtis, Gesler, Smith & Washburn, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1998).

The size of the institutions was categorized as follows:

- *Small* – less than 2 000 students;
- *Medium* – between 2 000 and 5 000 students; and
- *Large* – more than 5 000 students.

The level of involvement of the participant with governance at their institutions are categorized as follows:

- *Executive* – high level of involvement in strategic level governance, including external governance;
- *Facilitator* – high level of involvement in the facilitation of a range of governance activities at different levels of the institution;
- *Administrator* – high level of involvement in administering, arranging and documenting governance content and practices.

TABLE 2: Criteria for selection of participants

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Number of courses offered by institution</u>	<u>Size of the institution</u>	<u>Single / multiple sites of delivery</u>	<u>Specialized / Broad-based offerings</u>	<u>Role category</u>	<u>Level of involvement with governance</u>
Participant 1	3	Small	Single	Specialized	Senior executive	Executive
Participant 2	12	Large	Multi	Broad	Senior manager	Facilitator
Participant 3	15	Large	Multi	Broad	Senior executive	Executive
Participant 4	17	Large	Multi	Broad	Senior manager	Facilitator
Participant 5	5	Medium	Single	Broad	Senior executive	Executive
Participant 6	11	Small	Single	Specialized	Manager	Administrator
Participant 7	3	Large	Single	Specialized	Senior manager	Facilitator
Participant 8	75	Large	Multi	Broad	Senior executive	Executive
Participant 9	25	Medium	Multi	Specialized	Manager	Administrator
Participant 10	20	Large	Multi	Broad	Senior manager	Facilitator

Organizational charts were obtained from private higher education institutions and the associated individuals responsible for governance were identified. The potential participants were then approached to participate in the interviews. Subsequent to informal conversations, written consent was obtained from them (Annexure 3).

4. The role of the researcher in IPA

In IPA studies, the researcher plays a key and very personal role. As the researcher, I had to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants and then to move beyond this to interpretation, as outlined in Figure 4. It was also my responsibility to progress through the phases of data analysis, from the coding to experiential themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In IPA, the researcher acts as analyst and is 'interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world' (Smith, 2007, p.66). For this study, I was interested in learning more about the participant's experiences of governance.

I had to ensure that suitable participants were selected and that the interview questions were formulated to generate insight into the experiences of the participants. I conducted the interviews myself, as this was an opportunity for me to hear about the experiences first-hand and engage with the participants directly. According to Finlay (2014, p. 124), the researcher needs to be 'open and curious' when listening to participants talking about their experiences. I had to have a good understanding of the phenomenon of governance and how it is described in the literature. The two iterations of the conceptual framework resulted in me being comfortable engaging with the phenomenon. Due to the different titles and position descriptions used at different institutions, the participants were not selected based on level or role, but rather on how the position they hold relates to governance practices and areas of responsibility.

The challenge for me as researcher in the course of this study was that I had professional relationships with most of the participants prior to the study. This, however, assisted with the 'bonding relationship' that is required to conduct successful IPA (Alase, 2017, p. 9). A strong relationship between the interviewer and interviewee ensures that honest experiences are relayed and that follow-up questions can be asked. I also had to ensure that the participants were clear about my role as researcher, and not let them be influenced by any prior engagement with myself in a different capacity as part of my work in the sector. I had to ensure that I was able to move beyond my own views or perceptions about the samples institutions, as well as of governance in the sector generally (Finlay, 2014). This was an interesting process for me, as I have been extensively involved in audit- and accreditation-related activities in the sector. I could not let any prior quality assurance-related activities impact on my position as researcher, and I had to be focused on the participants' experiences rather than on my own preconceived ideas.

One of the key distinctive features of IPA is that the researcher engages in a 'dual interpretation' or double hermeneutic process (Finlay, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8). This is also called a double positional role, which includes discovery and interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). This means that the experiences imparted by the participants are the main element of the data collection process and that this is then subsequently supplemented by interpretative activity by the researcher. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) explain double hermeneutics as the analytical process by means of which the researcher focuses on the participants' inputs and experiences and their process of making sense of this, further supplemented by the interpretations and comparisons made by the researcher. An IPA approach allowed me as researcher to evolve from understanding the experiences to then interpreting these experiences in order to ensure the process of analysis resulted in meaningful findings.

5. Data collection

In an IPA study, it is preferable that data is collected from individuals in natural settings or in the unique contexts in which they occur (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Thus, the interviews were conducted at the institutions of the participants. This resulted in them being comfortable in the setting – it is known territory and a familiar environment in which governance activities usually occur, that is, where the phenomenon takes place. The interview questions were posed in an open-ended and flexible manner to ensure that they could facilitate the capturing of experiences; the interview could then be described as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ which is aligned with the purpose of the research study (Burgess, 1984, p. 102; Henning, 2004; Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). The data gathered during these interviews resulted in ‘rich and detailed descriptions of how individuals experience phenomena under investigation’ (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9).

According to Zeegers and Barron (2015), another way to collect data in qualitative research studies is through the analysis and examination of historical or current records and documents relating to the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the interview data were supplemented with document analysis to assist with their interpretation. The documents obtained is outlined in Annexure 6. This served as a point of departure during the interviews and participants referred to them continually. The phenomenon of governance is highly reliant on documentary evidence; thus it was deemed suitable to include written artifacts as secondary data sources for triangulation purposes. This resulted in data being collected through spoken and written words (Petty et al., 2012). Johnson (2014, p. 100) advocates a ‘double-pronged methodology’ that allows for the emergence of deeper levels of meaning, an aim that is confirmed by Metz (2000). In the case of this study, it also saved time as the participants could refer to a document that could then be consulted later by the researcher. Governance is complex and

entails detailed structures, membership listings, minutes of meetings, and so forth, which are captured in documents that are considered supplementary evidence. The data collection methods are discussed in detail in the next section.

5.1 Qualitative interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the practitioners sampled to participate in the study. All the participants had roles related to governance, and were involved in governance or were responsible for the administration and management of governance practices. As the researcher and interviewer, I posed open-ended questions to facilitate ‘detailed case exploration’, as advocated by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, p. 8). I developed an interview guide or protocol containing interview questions (Annexure 1), but was flexible in adjusting or adding probing questions when necessary during the interviews (Cooper, 2012). Forsey (as cited in Delamont, 2012, p. 367) confirms that the ‘phenomenologically oriented traveler is more inclined to follow the less constrained path of open-ended or semi-structured interviews’. I found it useful to have the pre-formulated questions in the interview guide to ensure that the main aspects related to the research questions were covered and to keep the interview on track. I incorporated my own conversational style during the interviews; this can be described as an ‘interactional exchange of dialogue’ (Mason, 2002, p. 63). The interview questions were based on the research questions and the first and second iteration of the conceptual framework developed during the literature review. The average duration of each interview was approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

During an IPA, it is important for the researcher as interviewer to ‘bracket’ or withhold personal interpretations, perceptions, and ideas (Creswell, 2015; Finlay, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). The process of *bracketing* was necessary to ensure that my views as a peer, colleague, consultant, and practitioner in the higher education sector in South Africa were put aside – I had to make way for the experiences of the participants to be prioritized and accurately captured. Bracketing also allowed

for the questions to be focused on the experiences describing the phenomenon being conveyed to me as the researcher; only thereafter could I allow myself to proceed to meaning construction and interpretation (Schram, 2006).

Permission was obtained from the participants to record the interviews. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate the detailed and systematic processing of the insights shared through dialogue (Cooper, 2012; Delamont, 2012). The transcriptions were needed to facilitate the analytical processing of the raw data and to ensure that the precise details of the conversations could be coded, themed, and synthesized in order to capture the essence and key aspects of governance as a phenomenon (Thompson & Walker, 1998). Reflective or descriptive notes were taken, as suggested by Creswell (2007), and comments were made for further probing during the interviews.

5.2 Document analysis

As mentioned above, document analysis was used as a supplementary data collection method. Documents on governance practices were collected from the different institutions. This was used as a secondary data collection method during the interpretation phase of the data analysis (see Figure 4). The experiences of the participants were triangulated with the formal or public position of the institution regarding governance, as well as how this is lived and implemented at the institution. I realized early on in the study that governance practices vary greatly between institutions and that the time spent with interviewees would be limited. The document analysis (list of documents outlined in Annexure 6) revealed similarities or differences between the participants' experiences and formal source documents.

The documents contain evidence relating to institutional governance structures. The interviews were focused on the experiences of the participants and reference could be made to the documents. It was useful to assure the participants that the

documents would be used during the analysis, and that they were not required to provide specific or lengthy technical details and could thus focus on their experiences rather than to rehash documented information.

The documents obtained from the participants, or from the institutional websites or other public resources, are described by Pistrang and Barker (as cited in Cooper, 2012, p. 9) as 'naturally occurring written texts'. A variety of documents was considered, such as policy documents referring to governance structures, committee terms of reference documents, governance structures and frameworks, committee websites, membership lists, externally facing institutional profiles, and the like. Merriam (1998) supports the view that a number of different types of documents should be considered. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) confirm that official documents can be viewed as data, for example, policy documents, minutes of meetings, codes, statements, proposals, and planning documents. An argument can be made that such documents do not accurately reflect reality. I was, however, interested in the contextual information they provide so that I could compare the experiences of the participants with contextual and documented reality. This assisted with determining the correlation between the published truth and the experiences lived by the participants in a particular context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The documents were considered during the interpretation phase through literal, interpretative, and reflexive reading (Mason, 2002). The artifacts outlined the governance practices at the institutions and were mostly viewed as supplementary, as per the references made by participants. Analysis of the texts was conducted at the same time as the transcribed interview data. This assisted me in discovering the themes and sub-themes linked to the conceptual framework (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Westbrook, 1994).

6. Data analysis

Within a phenomenological framework, data is analyzed based on the life worlds of the participants, that is, 'lived self, lived time, lived space' (Zeegers & Barron, 2015, p. 105). The data analysis should consider the experiences relayed by the participants, if possible in the space in which the phenomenon occurs. As mentioned above, the IPA method is deemed appropriate for the collection of data as well as for the analysis of the phenomenon of governance in private higher education institutions in South Africa. There are no prescriptions for how private institutions should be governed, and it is thus those undertaking and implementing governance who are best positioned to provide the most accurate reflections. It is important that the data collection and the data analysis be conducted in accordance with the phenomenological philosophy (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). The data analysis process commenced with gaining an understanding of the experiences of the participants, and then proceeded to interpretation of the data.

The constant comparative method, paired with thematic analysis, are the methods of data analysis used for this study. The coding phases of data analysis were conducted using the constant comparative methods, and themes were derived by means of thematic analysis. The richness of these two methods was combined to ensure a thorough process of data analysis. The methods are described in the next section.

6.1 Constant comparative method of data analysis

The constant comparative method was put forward by Glaser and Strauss (1967), initially in relation to building theories as part of the grounded theory approach. It involves constantly comparing one piece of data with another, with the aim of identifying patterns across different data sets. Later, the thinking around this method of data analysis expanded to the effect that the result will not necessarily

lead to the formulation of a new theory, but rather to a set of findings subsequent to interpretation by the researcher (Fram, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The method entails a process by means of which the raw data is systematically compared and interpreted; this, rather than pre-empting the generation of theory from the process, determines the result. The inductive or deductive analysis process is based on the conceptual framework presented above. Through the constant comparison of words, phrases, and units of meaning, I evolved from initial codes to descriptive codes and then to conceptual codes, which then led to the thematic analysis.

This process is undertaken through detailed, line-by-line analysis involving moving from the raw data to a more abstract level, ensuring distance between the researcher and the data, seeing it from a distance, and in this way allowing the emerging themes become apparent before commencing with interpretation (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). As codes are clustered, patterns emerge in the conceptual coding stage and some themes become apparent. Thematic analysis is used to derive the final themes from the coded data.

6.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a suitable match for the constant comparative method, and is used to supplement and evolve the process outlined above. Thematic analysis refers to the process of identifying themes in the data (Saldaña, 2009). When following an IPA approach, thematic analysis is used during the interpretation phase in the latter part of the dual process (Smith, 2007). According to Pistrang and Barker (as cited in Cooper, 2012), thematic analysis aims at identifying and describing central themes or categories in the data. Braun and Clark (as cited in Cooper, 2012, p. 57) define thematic analysis as a method of 'systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes)

across a data set', which is in accordance with the principles of IPA. Ryan and Bernard (2003) view theme identification as an essential activity in qualitative research. The theme-based approach focuses on extracting sections from raw data that overlap, or are similar or related. Creswell (2007) confirms that thematic analysis fits within an interpretivist approach. It leads the researcher from raw data and codes to themes and findings (Cooper, 2012).

It is important to derive the themes from the raw data and to avoid having pre-determined themes. This relates to the process of 'bracketing' (Finlay, 2014, p.124), as described above, in the course of which the researcher should put aside his or her own views and ideas. As the phenomenon is significant to me as a researcher, it was expected that there would be preconceived ideas about the topic; however, the aim is to consider the experiences of the participants.

The procedures followed in this study are outlined in the next section.

7. Process of data analysis

The aim of the interviews was to explore and learn about governance as it is experienced by practitioners involved in the process. Their experiences were captured, recorded, and transcribed to enable multiple iterations of analysis (Smith, 2007). IPA is flexible, thus allowing the researcher to adjust according to the research objectives and to continually assess whether these are met (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As outlined in Figure 4, IPA requires a balanced analysis process of phenomenological description and interpretation.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to facilitate the intensive data analysis process (Merriam, as cited in Wang, 2015). The transcribed interviews and documents obtained were numbered and coded per participant and institution. An inventory of the transcripts and documents was created to ensure that I had a record of the documents obtained by institution, linked to the participant

interviews. Institutions were randomly listed as A to J to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. This ensured that neither institutions nor individuals were exposed or identified during the data analysis and the presentation of the findings. There was one participant per institution, which meant that the institution and the individual could be linked. It was my responsibility as researcher to ensure a structured approach to data analysis to enable cross referencing (Mason, 2002).

Each of the documents relating to a particular institution was then numbered utilizing Roman numerals, that is, i, ii, iii, iv, and so on. This system assisted in tracking documents relating to a particular participant and institution, and ensured that I could link a document to a reference in the transcriptions. An example of a document number is Biii, where B refers to the institution, linked to a particular participant, and iii is the document number. An inventory of the documents was kept, for instance:

- Ai – referring to the ‘Institutional governance structure’ document;
- Aii – referring to the transcribed interview conducted with the practitioner from that institution; and
- Aiii – referred to the ‘Terms of Reference of the Academic Committee’, and so on.

The transcripts were distributed to participants to ensure that they were comfortable with the content and to confirm that they agreed with the captured conversation. Themes and preliminary findings were also presented to participants to ensure that they agreed with my understanding and interpretation of their experiences. In all respects the participants confirmed that the transcriptions were accurate and they agreed with the categories and findings. They indicated that these were a true reflection of their experiences. I indicated that copies of the final research report will be made available to them upon its completion.

7.1 Stage 1 – Dwelling and identifying initial codes

During the first stage of the data analysis process, I engaged in a process of *dwelling*, which is explained by Von Eckartsberg (as cited in Finlay, 2014, p. 124) as ‘the process by which phenomenology makes room for the phenomenon to reveal itself and speak its story into our understanding’. The experiences of the participants evolved into stories that contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher needs to live and dwell in the data, to engage with it, and to immerse herself in the account relayed by the participants. Smith (2007, p. 66) describe this process of immersion as the ‘investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript’. For me this was only possible through being personally involved. I conducted the interviews, transcribed them, and conducted the analysis myself. This is an intensive and personal process (Delamont, 2012) and I preferred to do this manually and not to make use of software or third parties during this process.

The data analysis commenced with reading through the transcripts, documents, and notes made during the interviews. I followed the suggestion of Thompson and Walker (1998) to read and reread the transcribed interviews to ‘get a sense of the whole’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 155). I then proceeded to transform the raw data by highlighting important sections in the transcribed interviews and documents, making notes in the margin of the main ideas and the initial thoughts that arose. The conceptual framework was used as a point of reference. My approach was to look for ideas, important data segments, and to note keywords in the margins (Creswell, 2007). This phase was characterized by various continual cycles of comparing the incidents or appearances of meaningful sections. These are referred to as ‘meaning units’, and comprise words or sentences describing the essence of the experience (Alase, 2017, p. 11).

Each unit of meaning was coded. Saldaña (2009, p. 3) indicates that a code is a ‘word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-

capturing, and/or evocative attribute'. It aims to capture the essence of a data element extracted from the interview data or during the process of studying the documents and artifacts (Saldaña, 2009). It is thus a piece of data that can be extracted and presented on its own and still be meaningful. 'Units of meaning' are explained by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 56); these can be single words, phrases, or a full sentence. These words and phrases assisted the discovery an initial sense of the richness of the data, which then leads to the next phase of analysis.

7.2 Stage 2 – Descriptive coding

During this phase of data analysis, the initial codes are refined. This process also involves displaying the data visually to assist in identifying connections and organizing the data, looping back to relevant literature and the conceptual framework to ensure that the process is structured. This is where I in essence tested the codes against the literature and conceptual framework to ensure they fit the description of the phenomenon. This matching process was then used as test to determine whether a unit of meaning qualified to be included and represented in the eventual categories and themes. The data was organized according similarities, difference, frequency of appearance, sequence, and correspondence (Saldaña, 2009). The units of meaning were extracted from the documents and grouped together. The codes were then assigned a name, phrase, or definition. These definitions and descriptions of codes could then lead to the next level of coding, in which the codes are clustered into categories. This is a cyclical process of finding patterns and clustering in order to progress to consolidated meaning.

7.3 Stage 3 – Conceptual coding

Conceptual coding refers to the stage in the data analysis process in which one moves from understanding to interpretation (see Figure 4). The initial codes are escalated to a higher level to find relationships between them (Gizir, 2014).

Thompson and Walker (1998, p. 68) describe this as the phase where I moved from 'concrete information to a higher level of abstraction. Open coding was used – the data was examined, compared, and conceptualized to derive categories. The initial codes and descriptions provided the basis for clustering ideas. Bell (2005, p. 214) is of the view that conceptual coding allows the researcher to 'cluster key issues' to move closer to conclusions. This is a circular process that continues until a point of saturation is reached and I felt that all the units of meaning had been defined and belonged in a category, and that there were sufficient distinctions between the different categories.

Merriam (2009) explains that categories should be linked to the purpose of the study; they should account for all the data and should be mutually exclusive and descriptive. The aim is to reconstruct and relive the stories and worlds of the participants based on the conceptual framework (Dierckx de Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon & Denier, 2012). This level of conceptualization is an important part of the interpretation phase and is required to create meaning and revert to the purpose of the study. The categories were derived from the words and experiences of the participants, as well as from the interpretations I made (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

7.4 Stage 4 – Themes

The conceptual codes or categories provide the basis for the thematic analysis. The categories were merged or split on the basis of the visual display and organization of the pieces of data. This is an iterative and ongoing process to ensure that the volume of data is processed, reduced, and displayed in a thematic format that would inform the findings. The cyclical process of coding assists in drawing conclusions and verifying categories and eventually themes and sub-themes (Johnson, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wang, 2015). Zeegers and Barron (2015) reiterate that data analysis derives patterns, themes, and relationships between various ideas.

The result is a final set of themes and sub-themes, as well as a descriptive statement that describes the meaning and explains the essence of the theme as a finding (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This is presented in the next chapter as the final result of the data analysis process. Some themes which emerged were expected and familiar; others were surprising and unexpected. The research questions were kept at hand to ensure that the focus was maintained and that the themes were aligned to the questions. As per Merriam (as cited in Wang, 2015), the findings should provide answers to the research questions. Through the process of data analysis, the data was broken down into categories and themes, which leads to the interpretation phase and the formulation of findings (Creswell, 2007).

8. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant governance structure at the University of Liverpool (Annexure 2). The most important ethical obligation of the researcher is to 'respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)' (Creswell, 2007, p. 165). This is consistent with the participant-focus of the IPA approach. The participants were selected with care, as explained above, and written permission was obtained to ensure that they clearly understood the purpose of the research and had the opportunity to raise any ethical considerations or questions (Attachment 3). The participants were assured that they and their institutions would remain anonymous; this enabled them to share their experiences freely and without reservation.

Only documents in the public domain were used. These were obtained from the participants and institutional websites. Ethical considerations were also taken into account when the interviews were conducted. Ethical approval (Annexure 2) was granted by the University of Liverpool, which indicates that the research proposal sufficiently addressed issues of integrity, honesty, transparency, and mutual respect. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research

and of how the findings would be utilized. They were also informed that the transcriptions and the preliminary findings would be provided to them for verification.

The main ethical consideration was my involvement in national quality assurance and accreditation activities. The ethical concern was that the research project would be viewed as part of the work that was being conducted at national level at the time. This could have impacted on the responses of the participants, considering compliance and quality assurance requirements and not honestly sharing their experiences of governance practices at their institutions. Thus, it was made clear to the participants that the research project was being conducted independently. The private higher education sector is relatively small, and some of the institutions are well-known and possibly recognizable. I assured participants that the findings would be presented neutrally and that the institutions would not be exposed (Thompson & Walker, 1998).

9. Credibility and transferability of findings

Like all research studies, studies utilizing the IPA methodology should have mechanisms in place to ensure the credibility and transferability of the research findings. The quality of the research planning, data collection, and verification of findings should be determined through various triangulation and auditing methods (Alase, 2017). This should be no different within an IPA framework, as this demonstrates that the researcher has a thorough understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenon, which is supported by the literature review and conceptual framework. It is especially important to confirm that everything possible was done to capture and convey the true essence of the experiences of the participants and that contextual considerations were taken in account.

Zeegers and Barron (2015) indicate that traditional interpretations of validity and reliability are not always suitable within an interpretivist qualitative paradigm. It is, however, possible and necessary to ensure rigour and quality, though not to apply validity and reliability measures in the traditional sense (Sandbergh, 2006). During this study, various adapted verification strategies, such as triangulation, reflexivity, trustworthiness, validity, and reliability, (Cope, 2004) were used to ensure that methodology was suitable to the research design.

9.1 Triangulation

Triangulation serves as the first point of validation, as some researchers would argue that interviews, when used as the only data collection method, are 'notoriously unreliable' (Delamont, 2012, p. 365). This was undertaken by capturing different angles of the phenomenon in the interviews, based on the research questions and conceptual framework. Triangulation was also achieved as a result of the data being derived from multiple sources (Firestone, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1998; Trotter, 2012), namely the interviews and published documents. It is important to note that it was the experiences of the participants that were captured during the interviews, and that the document analysis was used to confirm contextual information and to assist with interpretation of the interview data, thereby demonstrating triangulation. For example, a participant would indicate during an interview that the content of the academic committee (or equivalent structure) was contained in the terms of reference. The terms of reference were then used as a point of triangulation to supplement the participant's experience of the clarity of purpose of a particular governance structure.

9.2 Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher, I recognize that the influence of my own experiences and subjectivity may influence the research process; this is referred to as reflexivity (Petty et al., 2012, p. 270). In IPA, this also relates to 'bracketing'

(Creswell, 2015; Finlay, 2014; Moustakas, 1994), which was explained above as the process of the researcher restraining themselves from imputing any preconceived ideas to the phenomenon. As part of the bracketing process, I was intensely aware of my prior professional engagements that involved the participants or their institutions. Malterud (2001) confirms that the background and position of the researcher affects the phenomenon they choose to investigate and how they conduct research – hence the importance of focusing on the experiences of the participants. As a researcher, I had to continually reflect on my behaviour and engagement with the participants to ensure that their experiences were considered as the source of truth. It was also made clear that the interview data is confidential, anonymous, and would only be used for the purpose of the research. In this way, reflexivity was achieved throughout the research process.

9.3 Validity

Lather (1993, p. 674) offers an apt description of validity in research as following ‘a regime of truth’. Traditionally, validity refers to the research instrument measuring what it is supposed to measure. According to Long and Johnson (2000) and Nastasi and Schensul (2005), validity in qualitative research is to be determined by means of the following aspects, which also applied to this study:

- ***Content validity*** was ensured through covering the experiences of 10 higher education practitioners from different institutions. In IPA, the content is the experience of individuals as captured during the interviews. The document analysis was also used to ensure content validity, both in cases where it differed or was aligned with the interview content. Contextual aspects were thus confirmed and validated through linking experiences with published content (Polit & Beck, 2010).
- ***Criterion-related validity*** relates to comparing the instrument and findings with a particular norm or standard. Criterion-related validity was achieved

through interpreting the interview content, documents, and research findings on the basis on the conceptual framework, which thus served as the standard or norm. The conceptual framework was presented as part of the literature review and establishes my understanding of the ideal state of governance in a higher education institution. It contains all the elements that should be considered regarding governance; this was used to obtain criterion-related validity.

- **Construct validity** relates to the relationship between the instrument and the construct being studied. This was achieved through the alignment of the research questions and interview questions, which were developed according to the conceptual framework, as the point of reference and comparison. The main constructs relating to governance in higher education were outlined in the conceptual framework and validity was obtained by using this as a guiding instrument or measure throughout the data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings. The interviews and document analysis are deemed suitable methods for data collection in this particular methodology.

Thus, this research project can be deemed valid on the basis of the alignment between the conceptual framework based on the literature review, the purpose of the research, the research questions, and, eventually, the findings (Mason, 2002). As the researcher, I had the responsibility of ensuring that the experiences presented by the participants were respected and prioritized, and that I had a good understanding of governance as a phenomenon. This enabled me to interpret and analyze the data and to present findings that can be utilized beyond the purpose of the study. The next section outlines the process and methods of data analysis.

10. Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research paradigm, as determined by means of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The research paradigm was determined as interpretivist and constructivist, and was embedded in phenomenology as the theoretical perspective. An IPA framework was used to ensure that it was the experiences of the participants are reflected, and this was supplemented by interpretations from me in my role as researcher. The chapter has presented the methods of data collection and analysis selected, and has outlined how the credibility of the research was ensured. Lastly, an overview of the main ethical considerations was provided.

This chapter has focused on the research methodology and the procedures I followed to derive the findings, initially from codes, preliminary categories, and, ultimately, broader themes. These themes represent the experiences of the practitioners regarding governance at their institutions. The findings and the descriptions explaining each of the categories and, in some cases, sub-categories, are presented in the next chapter. The process of data analysis provided me with the opportunity to engage with the data from the interviews and the evidence presented in the documents. This has led to findings that serve as a reflection of the state of governance in private higher education institutions, as experienced by those in the institutions.

CHAPTER 4 Findings

1. Presentation of findings

The aim of this research project is to gain an understanding of the experiences of practitioners in private higher education institutions in South Africa regarding the state of governance practices at their institutions. An IPA was conducted to gain insight into the following research question: *What are the experiences of practitioners involved in governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa?*

The research question was supplemented with three sub-questions, namely:

- *How do practitioners describe governance models or approaches at their institutions?*
- *How do they experience the balance between corporate and academic governance requirements?*
- *How do they experience the impact of contextual challenges to governance structures and practices?*

As described in the previous chapters, the literature review informed the interview protocol and document analysis, and the data was analyzed using the constant comparative method and thematic analysis. The process of analysis assisted in evolving the initial descriptive codes into conceptual codes, and eventually deriving the themes that constitute the research findings. Research findings are specific to a time and place, and stems from critical analysis and interpretation (Petty et al., 2012).

The findings of this study are thus specific to the private higher education context in South Africa and are derived from analyzing and interpreting the data collected

during the interviews and studying the documents relating to governance obtained from the various institutions. These themes and sub-themes are outlined in Table 3 below. This chapter considers each of the themes and sub-themes and includes references to the raw data, as captured in the documents or as transcribed from the interviews. The final section of this chapter revert to the research questions and provides a summary response based on the insights gained regarding the experiences of the participants.

TABLE 3: Summary of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Descriptions

<u>Theme & sub-themes</u>	<u>Description</u>
Level of understanding of governance	There is a general lack of understanding in the private higher education sector regarding governance and what this entails. This does not imply that governance and governance structures are absent but, in the experience of the participants, there is no common understanding of the definitions of terms and the purpose of governance. The participants also experience traces of corporate governance approaches.
Governance structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels • Clarity of purpose 	Governance structures in private institutions vary from minimal to extensive. There is extensive documentation outlining governance structures and levels of authority but, in the experience of the participants, this is often not implemented and is created for accountability purposes only. The purpose of various governance structures and decision-making levels is not clear.
Academic governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic • Operational • Academic leadership 	The participants experience a general lack of academic governance at their institutions. Corporate governance is evident and relates primarily to financial and stakeholder reporting requirements. Academics are viewed as not being integrated in the governance structures and a lack of academic leadership is experienced.
Impact on quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process • Content 	Governance in private higher education is not evidence-based and quality documentation trails are not available. In the experience of the participants, it is reactive in nature, decisions are often made in an ad hoc manner,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence • Review 	and governance protocols not adhered to. No evidence of governance review processes could be provided.
Linkage to policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic • Administrative 	Decision-making, compliance, and debates are affected by a lack of understanding of the link between governance and policy. Academic policies are available but, in the experience of the participants, are not integrated or used as a point of reference. Administrative policies are widely applied, but it is mainly procedural.
Contextual factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External • Internal 	Participants relayed that, in their view, external contextual influences are largely ignored. Governance is observed to be internally focused. Current political influence does not affect governance in private higher education, but dominates debates. They experience high levels of awareness of the internal context.
Levels of participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • External 	Participation is dominated by a small number of staff, often the owners and those closest to them. Participants feel that academic participation is lacking; however, best practice examples of student involvement surfaced. External participation is limited to board-level governance. In the experience of the participants, the main factors impacting participation are size and multiple locations.

It is clear from the research data that the participants experience corporate governance approaches and structures at their institutions. They indicate that governance is not practiced in an evidence-based manner, and the quality of minutes, documentation, and record keeping is inconsistent – they feel that these do not reflect or record the decisions made. They also experience that there is no link between policy development and approvals, on the one hand, and governance, on the other. It is clear from the interviews that governance is experienced as an informal, internally focused activity. There is some evidence of industry and external engagement; however, the participants do not feel that this is formalized, and thus is not reflected and integrated in the governance structures. Lastly, they experience uneven levels of participation in governance

structures. Membership and participation are dominated by core management groups and is not inclusive or representative of academic staff, students, and other stakeholder groups. The participants also feel that contextual factors are not reflected in the governance narrative. Each of the abovementioned themes is discussed further in the sub-sections that follow.

1.1 Level of understanding of governance

It is clear from the data that the participants do not have clarity about governance in their own minds. They clearly demonstrated that there is no consistent understanding of governance as a phenomenon in private higher education institutions in South Africa, and that they themselves do not have a common and clear understanding of it. The participants indicated that they do not always know what constitutes governance and what it entails. This in itself provides insight into the lack of understanding of governance in this sector. They experience that there is not a clear institutional knowledge of governance, which makes it difficult to manage. This does not imply that governance and governance structures are completely absent; however, the participants did not present a consistent and common understanding or definitions of terms, and there are discrepancies even within their own institutions. The majority admitted that they are not clear about the purpose governance structures should serve or do serve in their institutions.

My first observation is that the term *governance* is not well understood. Participants could not describe or outline their approach to governance. They experience this in an ad hoc manner and made reference to '*committees*' (Participants 3, 6 8) and that '*the work is done by various committees*' (Participant 1), thus making it clear that they relate governance to committee work. One of the participants indicated that '*governance only happens when we engage with the government*' (Participant 8), indicating that there is no clear understanding of the different layers of internal and external governance. One of the participants mentioned that it has become a '*buzzword*' (Participant 3), and also warned that it

has become meaningless and is randomly applied without being thoroughly understood.

It is evident from the interviews that competing governance models are often applied at one institution, and thus a wide variety applied within the sector. Evidence could be found of distributed governance models (Sultana, 2012), for example, *'we have a committee on each campus, dealing with its own issues'* (Participant 4), and *'we can't seem to get everyone together so we leave them to resolve issues of importance on that particular site or campus'* (Participant 8). It was clear that no real methodology or approach is being applied, and that governance arrangements can be characterized as ad hoc and based on locality, geography, and the operational needs of, in most cases, multiple sites of delivery.

The experience of governance is clearly consistent with corporate governance principles, which is not an unexpected trend. The participants referred to aspects such as *'board meetings'* (Participant 6), *'financial statements and reports'* (Participant 3), *'compliance with company laws'* (Participant 7), *'approval of audited financial statements'* (Participant 9). The majority of the documents received from the various institutions also focused on corporate terminology and content, including audited financial statements (Document Civ), financial reports serving at board meetings (Document Eii), and risk reports (Document Evi). This provides insight into the content of the meetings and the focus areas of governance structures in these private institutions. This is also reflected in the minutes of meetings obtained (Documents Jiii, Bvii, Gi).

One of the participants described their experiences of governance as being limited to meetings:

Governance for me refers to our committees. The key committee would be the board. This is where the board of directors sits and meet four times a year. The board is the most important governance structure that we have. That is, if this is what you mean with governance. In my mind, the board is our governance board, it directs

everything we do, and we are ultimately accountable to them for our finances to be signed off. (Participant 9)

The levels of understanding and experiences varied from informal daily or weekly operational gatherings to formally constituted quarterly board meetings. Some references were also made to high-level advisory councils, as per the following quote:

We have a rigorous process of governance by the advisory boards. Due to our programmes being recognized and accredited by these boards, we have to adhere to whatever requirements they set for us. Our advisory boards consist of experts from the field, from other institutions, from the public universities. They help us make sure that we have the right things incorporated in our curriculums, to ensure we keep our accreditation. (Participant 2)

When participants were asked about the content of governance (i.e. what is being discussed at meetings), it was clear that the content is not academic in nature and focused on operational and financial activities (Documents Ciii, Dv). These areas of focus are also understandable in light of the increased responsibility of private institutions to generate funds and they're not receiving subsidy funding from the government.

Remnants of corporate governance approaches is also evident due to the presence of extensive strategic planning processes and documents (Documents Cii, Jvi). The contents of the plans are futuristic and focused on growth and expansion plans, with limited academic content. Evidence could not be found that the development of these plans are experienced as being consultative and collaborative. Some participants indicated that the strategic plans are approved by board members, for example:

Each year we have to present our plan for the following year to the council members. They have to approve this. This is a document setting out what we are

planning and how many students we predict will enter our institution. In my view, this is a more financial or budget document, rather than a strategic plan.
(Participant 2)

The approval channels for strategic plans are also reflected in the minutes of meetings (Documents Diii, Jiv, Bvi) and included in the documents (Documents Jvii, liii); these are mostly approved at the highest level, namely board-level meetings. Many of the participants indicated that their institutions have offshore affiliations and endorsements from external partners or parent companies. However, it is not always clear from the interviews how such arrangements are incorporated in the institutional-level governance structures or that this is experienced as being integrated into governance structures. Mostly, the institutions function independently in terms of governance practices, or there is representation on the board.

These issues indicate that governance is not well understood, terminology is not used consistently, and that governance practices are experienced as corporate. It is not clear where decisions are made and whether this is consistently documented. The participants thus do not have a consistent understanding and experience of the phenomenon of governance.

1.2 Governance structures

The documented governance structures in private institutions vary from minimal to extensive (Documents Ci, Eiv, Jvii). There are documents available outlining the governance structures and levels of authority and, in some cases, best practice is present. However, what is documented is not consistently implemented. The participants are clear that they experience a gap between the documents and the practice. They were honest in admitting that the documents are often created for accountability purposes and not adopted by the staff.

In the document analysis, evidence was found of well thought through and

extensive governance structures (Documents Ci, Eiv, Jvii). In one case, it was mentioned that *'those documents were only created for the institutional audit, we have not looked at them since'* (Participant 8), or *'we are still implementing the structures that we had to present to the authorities, but it is a work in progress'* (Participant 4). There is thus a low level of recognition or compliance with any documented governance structures, guidelines, or codes of good governance. It was found that the documents do not accurately represent the state of governance at these institutions. Participants struggled to map their experiences to what is documented. Governance structures are extensively and thoroughly documented, but not implemented or integrated in the core business. For example:

Some of our committees have regular meetings. We do not have a document that is outlines what they should be meeting about, as this is determined by the issues of the day. We want to keep this short and streamlined to ensure we don't spend too much time in meetings. (Participant 2)

We have a document with all the committees and what they are dealing with, or responsible for. It also tells you who should be on the committees. All the groups are represented. Whether all the meetings take place, or whether these things happen, is a different story. We had to document all of this when we were audited previously. I don't think we have updated the document since then. (Participant 10)

In terms of the levels of governance, most of the references were to *'board meetings'* and discipline-specific groups, or departments meeting on a regular basis. Various examples were presented of *'departmental meetings'* (Participant 5), *'unit meetings'* (Participant 1), and *'staff meetings'* (Participants 7, 9). The focus of the responses is on frequency of meetings, which is viewed as an indicator of the presence of governance structures and evidence of good or sound governance. There is a sense that regular committee meetings form the basis of governance. The content and purpose of the meetings were presented as follows: to address *'issues of the day'* (Participant 7), or to *'take stock of where we are and who is busy*

with what' (Participant 2).

It is clear from the interviews that there is no consistent understanding of levels of governance. In some cases, participants referred to national governance or the 'government' (Participant 2) or 'government relationship' (Participant 8). The participants did not appear to associate different levels within the institutions with various governance functions or activities. Thus, there seems to be confusion between the various levels of governance, internal and external governance, and distinguishing the governance process from the overall approach followed. This is demonstrated in the following extracts from the transcripts:

Off course we have a governance relationship with the government. We can't function without approval from them. They have meetings, and we have to attend to make sure we understand the requirements, the requirements for our registration.
(Participant 10)

in our case governance happens every day. Every day we have to make sure that we communicate internally and externally. We have to have staff meetings and we have to meet with the government when necessary to ensure we keep our registration. We have our own committees, then the committees with people from outside, then meetings where we meet the government also, and sometimes we meet with partners and people from other institutions. (Participant 5)

The governance structures primarily reflect inward-facing governance. There is a visible exclusion of the academics, and institutions are to a certain extent removed from the state because they are not publicly funded. The participants relayed views of academics not being interested in governance.

The participants were not clear about the purpose of various governance structures and decision-making levels, especially in relation to the structures outlined in the documents. The findings mainly relate to the composition of committees, levels of accountability and authority, and lack of clarity of purpose.

Some evidence was provided of the formal levels of reporting, for example, *'the management team reports to the board'* (Participant 7, Document Eiii) and *'ultimately we work towards board meetings, as that is where the ultimate approval lies'* (Participant 5). It is also evident that board-level structures are efficient due to the extensive company law provisions in South Africa and the fact that private institutions are registered as companies, and thus need to be compliant. The financial responsibilities of governance structures are experienced as being far removed from the university level or academic governance, as explained below by a participant:

We have to adhere to the governance standards. We have to report financially and to our board of directors. We had to work through King III and make sure that we have everything in place. That was a big job, but now we have this right. The legislation also indicates what should be in place and how decisions should be made. So, yes, we adhere to the national company law. The academics are supposed to be there... there are spaces reserved for them should they want to attend. When they are there, they are mostly listening. (Participant 7)

In the cases where there is evidence of integration with academic activities, it is mostly coincidental and not thought-through or deliberately implemented. The value and importance of governance structures are recognised, but seem to be rehearsed statements, rather than real internalised institutional beliefs. The terms of reference of the governance structures are documented (Documents Ciii, Eiv, Giii); however, low levels of understanding and awareness of the content are displayed. The majority of the participants indicate that they experience their institutions as being flexible in their approach; this was presented as a positive element, without the recognition that too much flexibility can be detrimental to sound governance. This was confirmed by the following participant:

We meet when there is something to meet about. We have a flexible structure and we are responsive to whatever is happening at the institution. In times of crisis

we meet every day, other times when things are moving forward, we don't need to meet that often. That is very different from a university. (Participant 9)

Participants feel that the content of governance meetings is dominated by complaints (Document Aiii), misconduct (Document Bvii), academic integrity issues, and critical incidents (Document Eii). They appear to be dealing with operational matters and to be reactive in nature, such as when an ad hoc group of staff is often called together to resolve an issue. This is in no way reflective of the mandate of the committees as outlined in the governance documentation – there is thus a disconnect between what is documented and what is happening. There is thus no clarity on the functions and roles of committees and their relationships with other structures and levels of accountability. The content of meetings varies from one to another, and there is no well-understood framework to ensure the integration of the various structures.

It was found that private institutions represent governance in various ways. There are some very formal structures (related to corporate governance), and some informal, ad hoc daily meetings that deal with operational matters. There is clear evidence that participants experience a disconnect between academic and corporate governance structures, which is the next theme to be discussed.

1.3 Academic governance

The most unexpected outcome of the IPA was the display of a lack of academic governance in private higher education in South Africa. This means that the managers in these institutions do not associate governance activities with academic activities. Their experiences of governance do not include academic governance and, in some cases, academic governance is non-existent. This was expected to some extent due to the corporate nature of private institutions, but was found to be much more systemically absent and not only related to non-participation by academics. Corporate activities are emphasized, as reported

above, and academic matters are not experienced as being part of this. Governance content mainly relates to financial and stakeholder reporting requirements (Documents Ciii, Dvii, Jviii). This was confirmed by a participant who indicated that the board *'is not interested in the academic stuff, they are focused on financial returns and performance'* and *'the board trusts us to manage the day-to-day academic operations'* (Participant 2).

It is thus also clear that academics are not included in the governance structures. Those interviewed indicated that *'they don't have time for committees'* (Participant 2) and *'we leave them to teach as we want to save them from the administrative burden'* (Participant 8). The issue of part-time academics was also raised: *'the academics are only here when they teach, they cannot come for meetings, and if they do, we have to pay them by the hour'* (Participant 7). This speaks to the fact that academic governance models in private higher education institutions and contexts should take into account that access to academics cannot and should not be taken for granted.

The leaders of the private institutions are mostly experienced as being corporate leaders, for example, CEOs recruited to manage private institutions, or inexperienced managers (in the case of family owned private institutions) (Documents Ci, liii, Jiv). This was confirmed during the interviews:

Our CEO does not have an academic background, he is very good in everything and is learning about academics and what they do. (Participant 3)

There were not many cases where academics were in leadership positions, which explains the lack of prominence of academic matters in discussions. This also results in a lack of academic leadership. Major concerns were expressed regarding academic leadership, which are not restricted to these institutions, but apply to the private higher education sector as a whole. One participant stated:

we don't have good leaders in higher education in South Africa, and none of

the few we have wants to work for privates, we have tried to recruit from the publics, but they don't even know who we are. (Participant 9)

There is also variance in the experience of strategic and operational governance. Evidence of strategic engagement could not be found; rather, as mentioned above, there is an operational focus. The meetings are mostly attended by administrative or professional staff, with little, if any, involvement of academics (Documents Aiii, Jiv). This explains the theme of business-focused content: due to for-profit activities. As further explained by a participant, *'we can't get the good ones, we can't afford them and they will not come us' (Participant 1).*

The participants feel that academic governance is not well understood in the private higher education sector. Academics are often appointed on a part-time basis and are not consistently involved in governance structures. Governance activities are experienced as being beyond the scope of the work of academics, which leads to an emphasis of corporate governance activities.

1.4 Impact on quality

The findings provide insight into both the quality of the content and the quality of governance structures. The participants could not give a clear indication of whether governance activities and structures in private institutions impact on the quality of provision or offerings at these institutions. They do not experience a link between governance and quality. The participants indicated that governance in their institutions is not evidence-based and limited documentation trails of decisions are kept (Documents Dvii, Jiii).

Decision-making is experienced as reactive and ad hoc, and, compared to the content of the documents provided, governance protocols are often not adhered to. Some of the documents studied did not contain evidence of decisions taken (Documents Aiii, Dvii) or even a list of attendees (Documents Cii, Giii). There are very few instances of substantial minutes and the quality of the documentation is

generally questionable (Documents Dvii, Cii). The participants do not view documentation quality as a priority. When questioned about this, the responses were vague and the reasons given concerned capacity limitations:

We don't minute all the meetings, it takes time and the documents are not useful, no one uses or reads them again. Each will take down their own action items. We minute board meetings only. (Participant 6)

The content of the meetings is noted down by individuals who need to take action. We try not to do unnecessary work with only a few people. The minutes are the responsibility of the heads of the areas, they must follow up with others to ensure action is taken after meetings. This is not ideal, but we just don't have the time to spend on pages and pages of minutes. (Participant 10)

The quality of the content, if this was prevalent during meetings, is not captured accordingly in the minutes (Documents Dvii, Cii). In some instances, there were action items listed or areas needing attention. In most cases individuals were not assigned to issues.

No evidence of governance review processes could be found. This was almost viewed as a foreign principle; one of the participants stated, '*we don't even have time to have meetings, let alone time to review them*' (Participant 4). The governance structures are thus not regularly assessed, if at all, to determine effectiveness. If this is done, it is done in an ad hoc and reactive way, when something is deemed to be inefficient. This is then not a systemic change, but rather a '*quick fix*' (Participant 6) approach, as per the following explanation: '*if it is not working, we review and change it there and then*' (Participant 9).

Many of the participants indicated that there is a lack of knowledge of what quality governance means or how they should link governance to improvements in quality. It was mentioned that governance activities and decisions are often not

documented. The participants indicated that most decisions are made at an operational, ad hoc, day-to-day level, and this impacts on the quality of the evidence and the document trail of governance structures.

1.5 Link to policy

The participants do not experience governance activities at their institutions as being linked to policy. There is evidence that policy is in some cases discussed at meetings, but there is no correlation with policy development and decision-making. When asked about the appropriate structure with policy oversight responsibilities, one participant explained this as follows: *'we did the policies for the accreditation application, a consultant did it for us. I'm not sure whether anyone has read it, but at least now we have it'* (Participant 3).

It was clear that there is a disconnect between decision-making, compliance, and general debates about institutional policies. Policy documents are available but are not integrated or used as points of reference. Administrative processes are widely applied (Documents Giv, Diii), but with no clear links to relevant policy documents. It is acknowledged that academic policies are required for accountability and compliance purposes; however, these are not integrated in the governance procedures. There is a lack of clarity about the relationship between governance and policy, as is clear from the following comment:

I'm sure there are academic policies. We have to submit them as part of our programme accreditation applications. The academics work with these continuously. That is their business and they have to ensure that they have the policies in place. I'm sure they have their own meetings where they look at the policies and make changes where necessary. That happens on the academic side. (Participant 8).

The participants could not provide detailed experiences of how document trails are developed and followed up to provide evidence of policy approval. The link between policy and governance, or governance structures in which policy

approvals took place, could not be found.

1.6 Contextual factors

The participants made it clear that they feel tired and experience high levels of frustration with the contextual factors in South Africa, which severely impact on the higher education sector. I observed a sense of indifference and the interviewees having reached a point of saturation. In the course of the interviews, it became clear that the questions are difficult for them to answer, as the contextual factors are draining for both staff and students. These clearly have a paralysing effect and thus affect the participants on a daily basis. Personally, I have become used to reading and hearing about damage and destruction to property and facilities without being shocked. The participants relayed that the academic year commences with caution and concern due to the uncertainty about what will transpire, and there is evidence that this is also affects private higher education institutions even though they would be expected to be at a remove from such issues. The research participants spoke passionately about the need to move forward to rebuild the sector. They used words such as '*determination*' (Participant 4), '*we need to fix this*' (Participant 9) and '*there is so much potential in the sector*' (Participant 7). The call for innovation and change could not be louder and, at the same time, more desperate.

The participants indicated that they continually attempt to avoid external influences. Some of them expressed their desire to function in isolation and that it helps to be attached to a global network or institution. It is clear that activities have become more internally focused, with little evidence of industry involvement in governance structures (Documents Ciii, Di, Giv). There is some evidence of industry relations and partnerships; however, these are not affiliated or linked to governance structures.

Evidence could be found that the current political situation directly impacts on

governance in private higher education institutions, as it dominates the discourse and daily experiences of the participants. High levels of awareness of the internal context are evident, as explained by a participant: *‘we are worried that the students will protest to pay no fees. We are private, we have to charge fees, we are not getting anything from government’* (Participant 1), and *‘we stay out of it, as long as our students are happy, we are happy’* (Participant 4).

It was made clear by the participant that governance activities are experienced as an internal matter. Furthermore, governance is observed to relate primarily to company secretariats and board-level governance. The result of this is that the external and contextual factors impacting on higher education, and thus private higher education, are not covered or considered within institutional governance structures. Participants are clearly focused on the company and its requirements, rather than the higher education environment.

1.7 Levels of participation

Levels of participation are experienced as uneven by the participants. In their experience, participation is dominated by a small number of staff, often the owners and those closest to them. Governing bodies are not perceived to be representative of the full scope of the institution’s function and business. It was also found that academic participation is lacking; however, best practice examples of student involvement surfaced (Documents Bvii, Jiii). External participation is limited to board-level governance and industry advisory boards are often managed in an informal and flexible manner. The main factors impacting on participation are the size of the institution and the multiple operation locations. A participant indicated that academics *‘cannot be in the meetings, because they are all over the country, they teach at our other sites’* (Participant 8).

The participants feel that governance activities were heavily reliant on them as managers. The size of the institution is often used as excuse not to have appropriate governance structures in place, for example:

We are so small, we have so few people that are here full time. We just get together and talk about problems, I don't know why we now need to make all of this formal and document everything, it will just take more time. (Participant 1)

There is high level of overlapping membership due to the small staff groups managing smaller institutions. The same people sit on the same governance structures, and they fulfill multiple roles (Documents Ci, Giii). Concerns were raised that all interests are not represented, because of the multiple roles, for example, *'we all do a bit of everything, I represent the academics and the library on the committees, but I sometimes forget about the academic issues, because we need to extend our library and that is taking all my attention'* (Participant 2). The participants thus experience a lack of clarity regarding roles, and the number of structures is not coherent or suitable for the size of institution.

Besides a few best practice examples of student participation, this is also constrained by the multiple locations and the fact that students serving on governance structures do not really represent the diverse student profiles studying at the various sites or online. Issues of confidentiality of information were also raised in relation to students, particularly regarding financial statements, shareholder information, and the like. Some best practices were displayed: students play active roles and are exposed to multinational institutions. This, however, was viewed to be more in relation to industry and community engagement efforts (Documents Aii, Dvii, Gi), rather than participation in governance structures. It is clear that staff segments and students are not consistently represented on governance structures. Decisions are made by key staff and, at a strategic level, at board governance levels, which leaves little room for institutional representation and participation.

2. Answering the research questions

The IPA approach has revealed the many complexities when a phenomenon such as governance in higher education is considered and how this is experienced by those closest to it. It is necessary to revert to the research questions and summarizes the findings in relation to these.

2.1 What are the experiences of practitioners involved in governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa?

Kezar and Eckel (2004, p. 373) refer to the need for increasing work and research on the 'scholarship of governance'. This IPA study aims to gather the views and experiences of those closest to governance activities in private higher education institutions, of those directly exposed to and involved in the phenomenon being investigated (Zeegers & Barron, 2015). I presented a conceptual framework for governance in higher education, which can be thought of as an ideal state, in Figure 3. This represents the elements derived from the literature review and deemed important by key authors on governance, namely Clark (1983), Braun (1999), Birnbaum (1988), Van Vught (1993), and Shattock (2012). When considering the perceptions and experience shared by the participants, as well as the content of the documents, it is clear that there is a gap between the ideal state and state of governance in private higher education in South Africa. For ease of reference and comparison, see the two conceptual maps below.

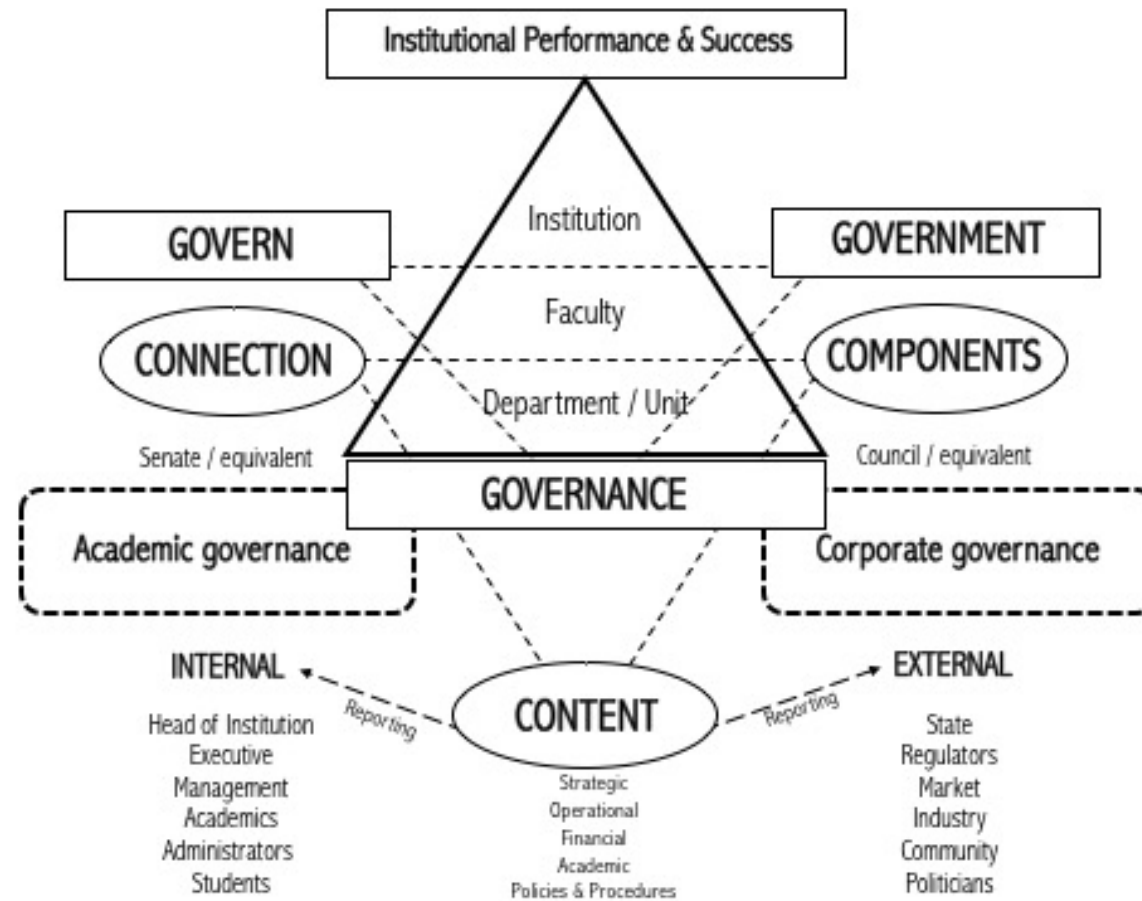


FIGURE 3: The Ideal State of Governance in Higher Education

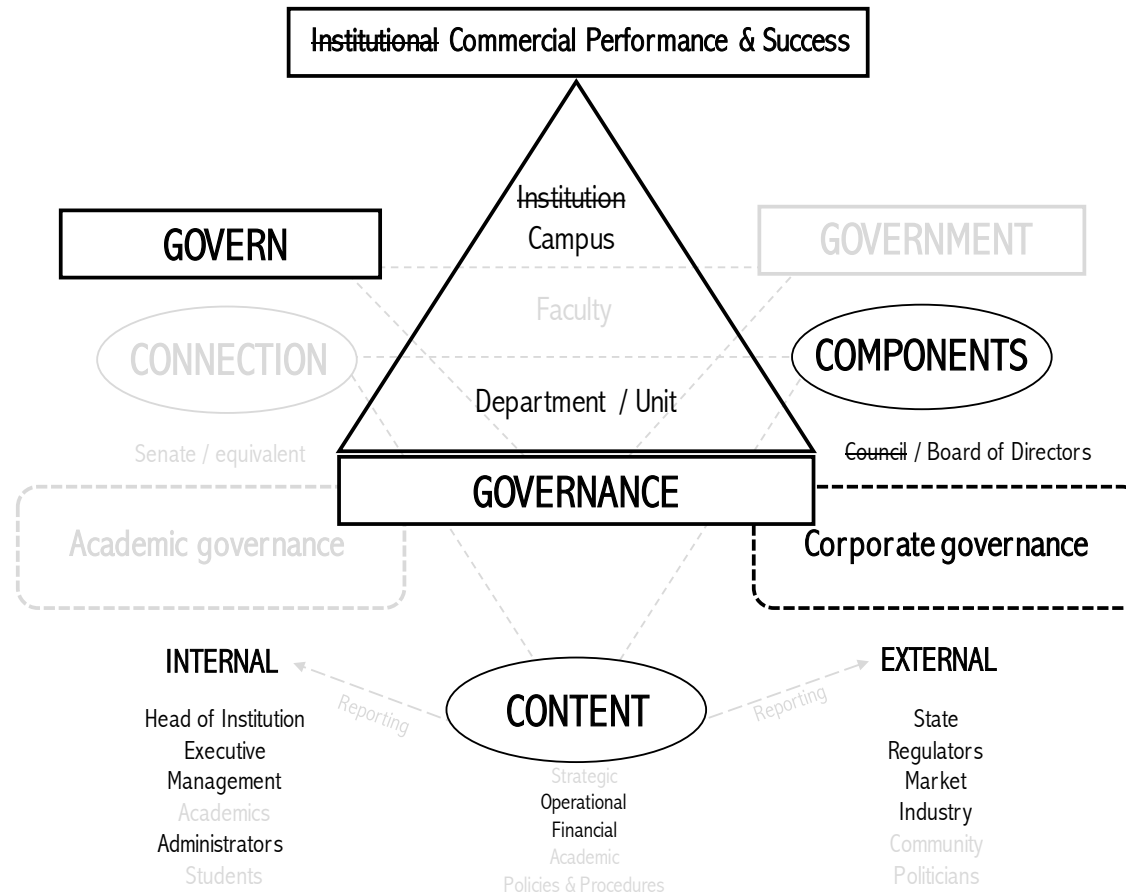


FIGURE 5: The State of Private Higher Education in South Africa

The same concept map is presented, reflecting the state of governance of private higher education in South Africa (see Figure 5), which can be compared to the ideal state of governance (see Figure 3). In Figure 5, the elements not reflected in the raw data are coloured lighter grey. It is thus clear which elements are experienced by the practitioners at the sampled institutions, but that there are some aspects that are not currently evident. It is the view of the participants that private higher education governance is corporate in nature, with very little or limited academic governance presence and activity. The focus is furthermore on commercial success and performance, as opposed to institutional and academic success. There is a lack of integration between the various components, and many aspects are isolated rather than embedded as part of a holistic governance structure and framework. There is a clear reporting element, mostly external to the board of directors (or equivalent structure), as opposed to the academic structure that carries the ultimate authority and decision-making power. The content of governance is mostly operational and financial in nature, rather than strategic and academic. There are also no clear governance structures and levels present in private higher education institutions: the structures are ad hoc and driven by operational challenges rather than by pro-active planning and policy development.

The themes, sub-themes and descriptions are outlined in Table 3, which represents the final iteration of the findings, as compiled and refined during the process of data analysis. In summary, it is clear from the findings that there is not a consistent level of understanding of governance, higher education governance, and the purpose these should fulfill in institutions. Governance structures are not coherent and vary across the different types and sizes of private institutions. Academic governance is an area of concern, and it is clear that this is not prioritized by most of the institutions included in the sample.

The focus in South Africa over the last two decades has been dominated by

political issues of equity, access, and diversity. This is very much aligned with the national plans and objectives set out for higher education (CHE, 2007) and the transformation that was, and still is, required. The last two years can be characterized as destructive and devastating in some instances, due to staff and student unrest and political interference, as discussed above. This has been described as chaotic, with students and staff displaying much more than discontent (Cloete, 2016). There has been limited focus on core business and governance matters and it is increasingly recognized that institutions struggle with managerial-level expertise, finding executives with a corporate background, and understanding the real issues facing South African higher education. In the South African higher education space, research is much needed, specifically on governance, leadership and management, as this is where key decisions are made about the future of higher education.

2.2 How do practitioners describe governance models or approaches at their institutions?

When considering the responses from the participants and the document analysis, it is evident that governance in private higher education in South Africa is experienced as predominantly corporate in nature, as indicated by Brondoni (2006), and is less representative of the shared and collegial governance models postulated by Baldrige (1971) and Burke (2010). The benefits of corporate governance are widely accepted and recognized and deemed suitable for private institutions as this provides for quick response times and efficient decision-making processes. Vidovich and Currie (2011, p. 43) confirm that the 'adoption of more corporate models of governance is a contemporary trend in higher education', and Sultana (2012) also recognizes that private institutions need to adhere to certain corporate requirements. It is clear from the participants that their institutions reflect 'business-like institutional designs' (Locke et al., 2011, p. 54). It can be concluded that the practitioners experience their institutions as

using corporate governance models. This is confirmed by In't Veld (1995), who mentions that it is not unexpected that private institutions should have business-like governance structures.

2.3 How do they experience the balance between corporate and academic governance requirements?

The participants do not experience alignment between corporate and academic governance at their institutions. Academic governance is not put forward as common practice, and there is a lack of evidence of policy formulation and approval processes. Shattock (2006) defines academic governance as a framework within an institution for decision-making for matters relating to the academic project; this, however, is not present in the minds and experiences of the participants. There are also no evidence of academics participating in corporate governance structures. Although Boyd (2009) is of the view that a lack of academic participation can often be expected in universities, there is a clear absence of academic governance structures and activities in private institutions in South Africa.

In light of the fact that academic governance is experienced as scarce in the institutions represented by the participants, this will also impact on academic credibility. There has been evidence of increased links between academic and corporate governance in higher education; however, Greatbatch (2014) has noticed the decline in faculty participation and the need to use the expertise of academics in the interests of the institution. Academics should challenge administrators, managers, and executives and strive for increased accountability. In the private institutions included in this study, traces of managerialism (Reed, 2002; Trow, 1994) can be found, in terms of which institutions are deemed to be business ventures, with no recognition of the uniqueness that identifies a university or of the need to include academic matters in conversations. Kulati

(2000) agrees that the recruitment of academics and especially academic leaders is problematic in the South African context and has an impact on academic credibility. Birnbaum's model (1988) emphasizes the importance of academic leaders managing by consensus and consultation to ensure the links between the various parts of the institution.

2.4 How do they experience the impact of contextual challenges to governance structures and practices?

In studying the experience of practitioners in private higher education institutions, it has been found that governance does not support these institutions to respond to contextual challenges. The work and activities occurring within the governance framework are not linked to the external environmental challenges, and governance activities are perceived to be internally focused. Christopher (2012) makes it clear that it is not unexpected for different institutions to respond differently to external influences; however, he is of the view that this often influences the governance paradigm, which is not the case in the experience of the practitioners. It thus became clear that governance does not support private institutions in South Africa to respond sufficiently to contextual factors and the changing higher education landscape and environment (Copland, 2014). The participants indicated that the South African context is extremely complex and that they are frustrated with dialogue and continuous disruptions. According to Greatbatch (2014), all institutions are challenged in managing and governing in a changing environment. Fielden (2014) is of the view that the regulatory environment in South Africa is continually changing and that this should impact on governance approaches, which is currently not the case.

3. Impact of the research

The impact of this research is, first, to inform the national context through the relevant authorities concerned with quality assurance, national accountability,

and improvement frameworks and activities, and thereby to increase their understanding of the private sector. The aim of the IPA is to present how the actors or participants perceive and experience the phenomenon of governance, thus giving the regulatory authorities access to these insights (Kockelmans, 1994). The size, nature, scope, and diversity of the sector causes the authorities to shy away from and postpone dealing with or incorporating the private sector. It is continually mentioned that the sector itself should be part of the solution, hence the need to include it in key debates about increased access. The quality assurance mandate of the national authorities includes the private institutions, and it outlines that attention should be paid to governance. This research can raise awareness of how negative perceptions and the questionable reputation of private providers can potentially be addressed through sound and transparent governance.

Second, it provides a platform to engage with governance as a phenomenon (Zeegers & Barron, 2015) in both public and private institutions. This can create, continue, and generate debate about the value of good governance and produce best practice examples of how governance can potentially assist private institutions to manage perceptions and increase academic credibility. This is necessary within a context where forward thinking and strategic planning is not prioritized. This will create an opportunity to think innovatively about higher education management and governance as the diversity of the private sector certainly presents a range of governance practices and arrangements that can potentially also serve as good practice models that can also be considered by public institutions.

Thus, even though this issue is not constrained to and evident in the private sector alone, the purpose of this research project is to increase understanding of the state of governance within the private higher education landscape in South Africa. Visible, transparent, and sound governance practices can serve as a differentiating

factor that can ensure that the quality of private higher education is recognized by the public, students, and other stakeholders (Fisher & Scott, 2011).

Third, the impact as viewed in my own professional practice in which I work across borders and countries in different jurisdictions and regulatory frameworks. Merriam (in Wang, 2015) states that research projects should make a contribution to the knowledge base and increase understanding through sharing experiences. More importantly, it contributes to my own institution and those of the participants. This can be spread more broadly when the research is published and made available in various ways. It will potentially inform future governance practices, addressing the governance challenges in the current context, and lead to more effective management of higher education in South Africa. It also increases awareness in the private sector of the importance of academic governance for ensuring quality and credibility (Ramsden, 1998). The impact will also be to provide practical advice to those in leadership and management positions, or those responsible for governance, who are described by Shattock (2006, p. xii) as the 'university governance hierarchy'.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has considered the findings of the study as derived from the document analysis and the interviews conducted. The findings represent the perceptions and experiences of managers in private institutions regarding the state of governance in private higher education in South Africa. The chapter aimed to compare the current state of governance with the ideal state in order to demonstrate and highlight areas for improvement and attention. The chapter concluded by providing answers to the research questions and discussing the possible impact of the research. The final chapter present recommendations and conclusions regarding the need for private institutions to consider their current state and the trends impacting on the various institutions.

CHAPTER 5 Discussion

1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the major findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to the literature outlined in Chapter 2. It provides further insight into the meaning of the findings and presents my view as the researcher on their importance. Thereafter, I offer some general reflections and the chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study and presenting areas for further research.

The conceptual framework outlining the ideal state of governance in higher education (Figure 3) clearly shows the ultimate aim of sound governance: to contribute to and facilitate institutional success and performance. When superimposing the experiences of the participants at private institutions in South Africa over this ideal state, it is clear that there are some aspects that are overemphasized or overrepresented and others that are absent. The discussion confirms and sheds light on the gap between the ideal state (Figure 3) and current state as experienced by the practitioners (Figure 5).

2. Discussion of findings

The aim of the study has been to gain insight into the experiences of practitioners in private higher education in South Africa regarding governance practices at their institutions. The participants were drawn from 10 private higher education institutions; they fulfill management roles and are involved in governance arrangements. The major findings concern the level of understanding of governance, the current governance structures, the lack of academic governance, how this impacts on quality, the link to policy, contextual factors, and

participation levels. Each of these findings is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

2.1 Level of understanding of governance

The first finding indicates that there is a general lack of understanding in the private higher education sector regarding governance and what this entails. This does not imply that governance and governance structures are absent; however, it was clear, based on the experience of the participants, that there is no common understanding of the definitions of terminology or purpose of governance. This finding is supported by Schmidt (2014) who indicates that there are very different levels of understanding between the various stakeholders involved in governance. The participants predominantly experience corporate governance approaches. It became clear to me early on in the study that the participants were not engaging comfortably on the topic of governance and that they had different expectations of what the interviews would entail. Some of the participants were more knowledgeable about the phenomenon of governance, and some had experience and a background of working in public institutions. However, in most cases, it was very clear that there was a lack of understanding among the participants and, as a result, some of the questions were not well understood.

This is an important finding, as it indicates that there is a fundamental lack of understanding of what is required and expected in terms of governance in higher education institutions, even before one consider the unique challenges facing private higher education. The participants were able to comfortably converse about committee work and board governance activities, and they gave examples of governance structures that are in place; however, their experiences were very different, contextual, and institution-specific. It was also clear that they did not have overly positive experiences of governance, and that this is possibly due to the lack of understanding and an inability to engage and converse confidently on

the topic. Scott (2018) supports this finding, referring to the lack of critical enquiry (universities are known for critical enquiry) when it comes to topics such as governance. This is a fundamental indicator of the state of governance in private higher education in South Africa. It is experienced as diverse, and was not described as *good* or *sound*. This is, however, not unique to South Africa. Brown (2011) suggests that there is a much broader need for clarity on what a well-governed university should be. It can thus be concluded that this might not only be experienced in the private higher education sector.

As mentioned above, it was clear that governance in the private sector in South Africa is experienced as predominantly corporate in nature, rather than academic or collegial. Barac and Marx (2012) state that it is not uncommon for universities to follow corporate governance approaches. This was confirmed during the interviews. The engagement on governance and terminology used were definitely more corporate in nature, which is expected due to the corporate company laws and requirements of for-profit organizations. Herek (1995) compares universities to corporate environments and concludes that universities have complex management models and approaches. The participants reflected on the complexity of their institutional structures, and could not explain how management relates to or is represented in governance structures. Sultana (2012) confirms that it is expected that for-profit, private institutions are more likely to adopt corporate governance strategies; the study has demonstrated that this is very much the case in this sector in South Africa. Sall and Oanda (2015) established that this finding is not unique to the South African higher education context; rather, it is common around the world.

The participants did relay experiences of governance engagements being consultative and collegial. This is supported by Birnbaum's views of corporate governance (1988), to the effect that it does not exclude engagement and collaboration. There are certainly structured discussion opportunities in private

institutions that facilitate communication and problem-solving, and various role players are involved in these activities. However, the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making levels are not clear. According to Locke et al. (2011) these are critical factors. It is important to recognize that corporate governance approaches are acceptable in higher education, and can be beneficial. They should not be equated with weak or unsound governance practices. Locke et al. (2011) also confirm that corporate governance allows institutions to move toward intended outcomes through careful planning, resource allocation, and monitoring efficiency. Thus, the benefits of corporate governance should be accepted. Carnegie and Tuck (2011) encourage open-mindedness to broad-based approaches to governance; however, they emphasize the importance of the integration of these with academic governance.

Listening to participants, I was concerned about their lack of ability to engage on the phenomenon of governance. I expected a higher level of understanding due to audit and accreditation requirements. This is a regular topic or line of enquiry of regulators during panel interviews and institutional site visits (HEQC, 2004). This finding is thus alarming, because I do believe that good governance is an indication of a healthy and stable institution, and the experiences described by the participants do not fill me with confidence regarding the presence of good and sound governance in private higher education institutions in South Africa. There is definitely a need for training and development in this field to ensure that systemic and foundational knowledge about the phenomenon is established. This will assist with increasing the much-needed credibility of private institutions.

2.2 Governance structures

The second finding indicates that there are a variety of governance structures present in private institutions. These range from minimal to extensive, with no direct correlation with the size or scope of the offerings of the institutions. The

diversity of these arrangements are confirmed by Altbach (1999) and Burns and Köster (2016). Extensive documentation and evidence have been presented. In the documents, governance structures are captured, as are levels of authority; however, in the experience of the participants, these are often not implemented in practice. They indicated that these documents were created for external accountability purposes (such as audit, accreditation and quality assurance activities). The participants were not able to convert these into practice. They could not explain the purpose of the various governance structures and decision-making levels. Kulati (2000) proposes that private institutions are ideally placed to proactively resolve issues through governance structures. However, it is clear from the data that governance structures and their intended content are not well understood by practitioners in private higher education institutions.

During the interviews, the participants were able to give examples of governance structures and confirmed the regular occurrence of committee meetings. It is clear that there are a number of active committees and governance structures, both formal and informal. According to Van Vught (1993), this is expected, and he indicates that there can be several governance categories and patterns of operation present in an institution. My main observation concerns the discrepancies between what was documented about governance and the actual experiences of the participants. In some cases, I could not find any correlation between the documents and the data collected during the interviews. I did not expect participants to have extensive knowledge of detailed terms of reference or have the ability to cite these from memory; however, I did expect some broad understanding of the various structures and how they relate to one another, and so lead to institutional success and exceptional performance.

Fielden (2014) asks how institutions are held accountable for governance, that is, whether they do what they say they do, demonstrating that there is a general concern about the relationship between evidence and practice. Other than

irregular or limited institutional audit or course accreditation site visits, there are limited opportunities in which private institutions in South Africa are held accountable for governance beyond what is necessary in terms of company legislation. Thus, this responsibility is largely delegated to institutions, which leads to questions not only about internal accountability, but also about management responsibility for ensuring that these structures are in place (Middlehurst, 2013).

Neither did the participants experience clearly defined levels of governance. Lock et al. (2011) indicate that institutions principally rely on two levels of governance, namely the internal (institutional) level and the external (board) level. External or board level governance was definitely front-of-mind and dominant in the experiences of the participants, as they were in most cases accountable to a board of directors, as opposed to a typical (in more traditional universities) high-level academic governance structure, or ultimately the state or government. Greatbatch (2014, p. 2) describes the board as a 'powerful strategy committee', and Fielden (2014) supports the need for strategic control by a board-type structure. Financial and operational reporting to board-level governance structures were evident; however, it was not clear whether board governance allowed for constructive strategic discussions and decisions. It can thus be concluded that the corporate governance structures produce high levels of awareness of reporting requirements, but that these structures are not experienced as engaging in strategic or academic content.

2.3 Academic governance

The participants clearly experience a lack of academic governance at their institutions. Corporate governance is prominent (as per the previous finding) and primarily concerns financial and stakeholder reporting requirements. Academics are viewed as being removed from governance activities, and a lack of academic

leadership was perceived. Windchester (2007) makes it clear that strong academic participation and engagement in governance structures are required at universities. Carnegie and Tuck (2011) call for an approach that integrates academic and corporate governance. It has already been established that private higher education institutions in South Africa are leaning toward corporate governance approaches, and it is thus not unexpected that this is at the expense of academic governance. Hardy (1996) describes universities as collegial organizations, which suggests a definite representation of academic views in institutional and strategic decisions.

It was concerning to find that academic governance is experienced as limited at almost all the institutions sampled. The conceptual model used in this study clearly indicates the need for a balance between corporate and academic governance. The model was adopted from Shattock (2012), and emphasizes the connection between the governing body, the management or executive team, and academic self-governance. There is evidence in the literature of the dominance of the relationship between the university and the state, which also excludes academic governance (Claxton-Freeman, 2015; Ferlie et al., 2008; Tandberg, 2013); however, Carnegie and Tuck (2011) remind us of the vital role of scholarship and academic leadership, representing the core business of universities, which is also apparent in Birnbaum's model of organizational functioning (1988).

This finding is consistent with Van Vught's (1993, p. 8) observation that private institutions often demonstrate a lack of 'academic drift'. The participants did not experience a strong academic presence at the institution, let alone in governance structures. In some cases, it was clear there is no awareness that this is required, or why it could be problematic. There was no indication of an intention to increase academic participation or to move the focus towards academic content. Fielden (2014) recognizes the distinction between (and necessity of) academic and operational or administrative content, but remains adamant about the importance

of academic matters dominating governance agendas.

Shattock (2006) describes academic governance as a framework for decision-making for matters relating to academic activities. Boyd (as cited in Vilkinas and Peters, 2014, p. 16) advocates that academic matters and activities be 'at the heart of a university's operations'. This is certainly not an evident aspect of governance as experienced by the participants. Fielden (2014) confirms that this is consistent with findings in other countries around the world. Various explanations could be offered for this. One reason is that it is becoming increasingly challenging to establish academic governance at private institutions due to the increasing number of part-time academic staff (Tierney, 2004). Another reason is that, in some cases, academics believe they only need to be involved in academic matters and are not willing to spend time in governance meetings (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2012; Locke et al., 2011). Scott (2010) further postulates that academics are not always equipped to discuss broader institutional matters.

This finding reveals that academic governance and participation are experienced as lacking or not present in private higher education institutions in South Africa. These institutions, as in other parts of the world, rely heavily on a part-time academic work force, and I believe the absence of academic leadership is a main contributor to the lack of presence of academics. Linked to the other findings, this indicates a need for innovative ways of governing private institutions while ensuring adherence to corporate governance structures, as well as the need for academic leadership. Not only are the structures at private institutions representative of corporate governance, this also results in a lack of academic participation and content.

2.4 Impact on quality

It was also found that governance practices in private higher education are not evidence-based and quality documentation trails are not available. In the

experience of the participants, governance is reactive in nature and decisions are often made in an ad hoc manner so that governance protocols not adhered to or documented. No evidence of governance review processes could be found. This finding indicates that the current governance arrangements in private institutions in South Africa impact on the quality of meeting content and decisions, as well as on the quality of course provision, which is consistent with what is postulated by Stander and Herman (2017). Private institutions in developing countries are described by Van Vught (1993) as having low levels of internal efficiencies and declining levels of quality offerings. Kulati (2000) confirms that institutions in South Africa are continually confronted with unique circumstances, such as violent student protests, destruction of property, criminal activity, and clashes between staff, students, and national authorities. This often causes a shift in focus and attention, and governance content is often dominated by contextual or political events rather than by quality improvement.

Zaman (2015) wrote about the links between institutional governance and educational outcomes. It is important that education outcomes are firmly on the agenda of governance structures, and these typically occur at the highest-level academic governance structure of universities, for example, academic board or equivalent. Vilkinas and Peters (2014) indicate that academic boards are key to overseeing and maintaining quality standards, though they also play a key role in strategic leadership on academic issues. If academic governance is experienced as being absent, then this would impact on the importance and attention given to academic matters within the current governance structures. I am of the belief that successful academic governance is not achieved only by having such a structure in place. Rowlands (2013) confirms that academic boards are often viewed as not fulfilling their academic quality-assurance responsibilities. Thus, the presence of an academic governance structure needs to be viewed in conjunction with the effectiveness of managing the academic agenda and content. However, at private

institutions in South Africa, academic governance is experienced as absent to a large extent and secondary to corporate matters.

In addition to the above, this finding highlights the lack of quality documentation or any evidence or indicators that the quality of governance activities is considered or reflected on. This is understandable when the current structures are experienced as being ad hoc and informal, and hence there is no evidence of reviewing it. This would probably only be visible once private institutions reach a sustainable balance between corporate and academic activities. Thus, private institutions in South Africa face a double challenge of ensuring that academic governance structures are created and that governance structures are reviewed with the view to improve, this in itself being an indicator of quality. Brennan and Solomon (2008) propose that there is a need to progress from addressing structural issues towards generating impact studies to ensure that real quality improvement is achieved through governance.

2.5 Link to policy

Decision-making, compliance, and debates at the private institutions sampled are affected by a lack of understanding of the link between governance and policy. Academic policy documents are available but, in the experience of the participants, are not integrated or used as a point of reference to manage academic matters (which is consistent with the finding on academic governance, as well as the lack of academic participation). Administrative policies are widely applied, but these are principally procedural in nature. This means that procedures are used on a day-to-day basis, but are not necessarily linked to a policy document. TEQSA (2017) provides guidance on how policies and procedures should be linked to governance.

The participants indicated that policies are not generally not discussed at governance meetings. Administrative policies (in most cases, these were found to be procedures rather policies) are developed as and when needed, and evidence could not be provided for the cycle of academic policy development, approval, implementation, and review. It is the experience of the participants that policies are generally developed for compliance purposes (e.g. the requirement to have, for instance, an assessment policy), rather than living documents that are used by staff. The current governance structures were found not to be geared to making provision for policy discussions on agendas, as it is either concerned with operational, day-to-day matters, or occur in board-level meetings. This is described by Hampton (2013) as deliberative governance. Policy documents are generally of good quality and contain good content, though the participants could not explain the policy development cycle. The minutes of meetings confirmed the experiences of the participants.

The participants identified a lack of academic policies and governance, which is consistent with some of the previous findings. In most instances, private institutions do not have an academic board or equivalent structure. It should be stated clearly that it is not expected that a small private institution would have an academic governance structure similar to a large, public institution; however, there is a need for some level of governance to be applied to policy development and approval. There is also a need to monitor implementation and facilitate policy review processes. It should be recognized that academic boards in public institutions are often perceived to be lacking in engagement and not to be consultative, transparent and participative (Meyer, 2007). Thus, *having* an academic governance structure does not in all instances translate to sound academic governance; however, currently, there is no evidence of any structure or point of engagement on academic policies in private institutions in South Africa. This finding thus relates to the lack of opportunity to discuss academic policy content.

An alternative to merely considering the structural aspect of academic governance would be the presence of a policy governance framework. Evidence of such frameworks in higher education are available, mostly in the public higher education sector. Such frameworks are put in place to ensure that all institutional policies (both administrative and academic) are developed, approved, implemented, and reviewed in a consistent manner with the necessary consultation and approval processes in place. Evidence of policy governance frameworks could not be located, even at an informal level. Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2017) indicates that policy frameworks provide the foundation for good quality policies. An interesting study conducted by Freeman (2010) on policy development as an integrated part of a policy governance framework also speaks to the benefit of having such a framework in place. This was, however, also not experienced as being in place at the private institutions sampled.

It was clear during the interviews that the participants were committed to quality work and expressed the need for their institutions to increase their reputation and credibility. This finding indicates that there is a need to go back to the basics of ensuring a consistent understanding of the importance of policy, the sense of obligation to introduce a policy framework, and to link this to governance structures and decision-making levels. There is a need to ensure that this is formalized and is part of the institution, and not merely displayed in documents. The participants thus experienced a gap between governance and policy and could not confirm the presence of a policy governance framework at their institutions. Dror (1971) deliberated about the moral obligation of institutions to improve and continuously update and review policy, acknowledging that this is not a quick process, and that there is a need to demonstrate commitment to improvement.

2.6 Contextual factors

Participants stated that current the external contextual influences experienced within the South African higher education sector are, in their view, largely ignored by their institutions. This ignorance is not due to these circumstances not affecting the institutions, but was rather presented as a survival mechanism for operating in the very volatile and disruptive context. Governance was observed to be mostly internally focused, which is consistent with the findings of Middlehurst (2013). In theory, current political influence should not affect governance in private higher education (as it relates to state subsidies), but it still dominates debates. The participants thus experience high levels of awareness of contextual factors, but aim to continue with day-to-day operational activities. As mentioned above, there has been a general (and understandable) exhaustion experienced as a result of operating in the South African higher education landscape over the last few years (Calderwood, 2016; Dell, 2016).

My assessment during the interviews was that participants were deliberately not focused on external contextual factors, with the aim establishing a sense of certainty amongst students and staff. This study was conducted during a time of intense political turmoil, which is definitely not usual when one considers the impact of contextual factors under normal circumstances. I am thus of the view that the experiences of the participants at the time were responsive and not representative of how they would usually respond. I did expect the external factors to have a positive impact and that the governance structures (irrespective of whether they are corporate or academic) would use the upheaval in the public sector to their advantage in terms of building a reputation as a key alternative option for students. However, I did not get a sense that the external context was impacting on governance content or decisions – the focus remained internal. The reason for this was confirmed by the participants: to ensure that they protect their institutions as much as possible from current external turbulence.

A study was conducted over a decade ago by Hall and Symes (2005) that considered the political restructuring of South African higher education through a governance lens. This study found that the political events at the time had a significant impact on governance; however, this study was only applicable to public institutions. More broadly, the impact of the political context on higher education governance is a well-researched topic (Hénard & Mitterle, 2009). This IPA study focused on the experiences of the practitioners of governance and contextual factors were found not to impact on governance. This should be viewed as a response in itself, one of maintaining the status quo. The need for safety and stability was clearly communicated and the participants agreed that they continually attempted to safeguard their institutions from the external environment and its influence. Knott and Payne (2003) indicate that uncertain political situations are often reflected in university strategies and power struggles in institutions; however, this was not found to be case.

Another important external factor influencing governance is the relationship between institutions and the state (Capano, 2011; Cloete, Pillay, Badat & Moya, 2004). Evidence could not be found of Clark's (1983) tripartite model, in terms of which university governance creates the opportunity for collaboration between the state, the market, and the academic project. As mentioned above, governance activities were experienced as being largely internally driven, and to some extent by the market, though not overtly, and rather as an unintended consequence. Even though discourse in the sector was dominated by the political situation, the private institutions represented in the study largely ignored the external governance environment (i.e. between state and institution), due to the content relating to funding and private institutions in South Africa not receiving subsidies from the higher education ministry (Govender, 2016a). The South African government does not have any prescription or guideline for private institutions in

relation to internal and external governance (Tricker, 2009). This is understandable in a context in which the public sector dominates the attention of the authorities. The participants experienced the content of governance to be determined and managed by the management teams and executives, probably also due to lack of external direction.

Various authors agreed that governance is contextual (Matengu, Likando & Kangumu, 2014), and Van Vught (1993) also believes that higher education institutions should adapt to their surroundings and environment. Thus, contextual factors certainly play a role in shaping the governance approaches and frameworks of institutions. It is clear that both public and private higher education institutions will never be able to achieve a single 'one-size-fits-all governance model' (Bótas & Huisman, 2012, p. 370). I did not expect to find evidence of a particular approach or governance model, and it is expected that institutions need different models as, even within one country or city, the context is unique and responsiveness is required to ensure relevance and sustainability. Mortensen (2009) reminds us of the uniqueness of higher education and how this requires flexibility in approaches to governance.

2.7 Levels of participation

Participation in governance activities is experienced as being dominated by a small number of staff, often the owners of private institutions and those closest to them. Participants experienced academic participation as lacking (as discussed above); however, best practice examples of student involvement surfaced. External participation is limited to board-level governance, which has also been discussed. In some cases, there were external members on the boards, or at least representative of the public interest (Hall et al., 2004; Reyes & Smith, 1987). In the experience of the participants, the main factors impacting on participation are small size and multiple locations of private institutions. Zeeman and Benneworth

(2016) agree that these types of institutions are confronted with the challenge of integrating and ensuring equal or at least representative participation at all their different sites. Kaufmann (1993) makes it clear that governance requires representation, participation, and continual communication, which is currently not experienced as achievable.

According to Middlehurst (2004), internal governance refers to internal management structures and leadership roles and how these relate to external stakeholders. Internal governance is critical to resolving conflict, making decision, enforcing autonomy and facilitating communication (Groenwald, 2017; Meek, 2003). Shattock (2006), however, highlights the need to extend governance participation beyond the borders of universities. Barnett (2011) is also clear about the relationship between the university, society, and the economy. As discussed above, internal governance structures lack academic input and participation and, currently, the governance practices at private institutions are experienced as being confined to management and the board, which constitutes external participation.

Some best practices examples surfaced related to student participation and the participants experienced this as having a positive impact. In some cases, the student body is small and it is relatively easy to ensure student participation and representation. This was more difficult in larger, multi-site institutions, which are becoming a common and increasingly challenging feature in contemporary higher education (Pinheiro & Nordstrand-Berg, 2017). I would, however, still question the real impact of student participation and how this has been weighted above the importance of academic participation. It would be interesting to determine the experiences of the students themselves, whether they are actually participating, and whether they find it useful and empowering to contribute to the decision-making processes in the institution. In research conducted in South Africa, it is indicated that the influence of political affiliations of students

dominate their participation in governance, and a need for capacity development to ensure effective participation (Moreku, 2014).

3. Researcher's reflection

The participants described South African higher education as *broken*, *destructive*, *devastating*, and *failing*. These words are very descriptive and emotionally charged. They resemble Virilio's (2010, p. 95) concept of the 'university of disaster'. His philosophical ideas outline how universities cannot keep up with the changing world and are thus heading for disaster. He uses a very telling analogy of how the invention of the 'ship' was also unfortunately and inadvertently the invention of the 'shipwreck' (Virilio, 2010, p.102). He concludes that reputation and deductions concerning whether a university is good or bad ultimately rest with how it is governed and managed. I agree with Clark (1998) that we need complex differentiated solutions.

Furthermore, universities are notorious for stagnation, and governance changes usually imply institutional or structural changes that are not easy to implement (Greatbatch, 2014). Private institutions are, however, well placed to make changes, as they are free from legacy and history, in contrast to their public counterparts. Fielden (2014) agrees that private institutions are suitably placed to allow for innovative governance practices. This will assist with improving the reputational issues that can be beneficial for the institutions, the sector, and, ultimately, the country. Shattock (2006, p. xiii) asserts that 'good governance will increasingly be regarded as having a major influence on institutional standing and reputation'. There are also strong views that organizational failures are often caused by failures in governance (Christopher, 2014; Liu, 2014). This is thus a call to action to find the most suitable governance framework that is not an additional burden, but is fit for purpose.

The literature is clear that there is no universal model that can be applied to all (Boggs, 2010; Wilson & Chapman, 2013a). The only certainty is that complexity will increase and that the pace of innovation will continue to accelerate, which will in turn continue to present fundamental challenges and require global leadership, and ultimately an 'education revolution' (Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi, 2013, p. 65). This should be reflected in our governance practices and our ability to adjust and evolve. Habermas (1987) postulated the need for institutions to first have an understanding of the current state of governance in order for them to move to at least a more ideal state. Institutions need to reflect and take stock and be willing to change.

Desperation and the willingness to change leads to the ideal state to progress. It is clear from the participants that this is not an easy, straightforward journey nor is there a single solution – a complex process of progressive change should be planned and embarked upon as a matter of urgency. ElObeidy (2014) asserts that modernizing, changing, and adjusting university governance should be a constant item of discussion. According to Heinrich and Lynn (2001, p. 112), the solution lies in the 'governance of logic', which emphasizes the need for systematic and logical approaches to determine possible alternative approaches and how to move towards these. The aim should be to move towards managerial efficiency that inspires confidence and builds credibility (Bitzer, 2009).

Van Vught (1993, p. 12) aptly summarizes a possible solution to the 'university of disaster' – the need for 'major changes in the overall approaches to governance in higher education systems'. He is of the view that this will assist in resolving the present crisis in higher education, especially in developing countries, an argument that is supported by Mohamedbhai and Parry (2014). There is thus a need to change from a perception of 'disaster' to innovative, adaptable, and change-capable universities (Christensen & Eyring, 2001; Scott, 2003). This is a call for not only extensive and systematic but also continual change. The selected

governance approach should be purposeful and guided by the articulated purpose and future focus.

4. Limitations of the study

As researchers, we have to recognize the limitations of our own research studies. As much as we wish to address a particular field or research question extensively, this is not possible within the limited scope of a particular study, which is constrained within a time and place. This study focused on the private higher education sector of South Africa. Even though private higher education, opposed to public institution (e.g. public funding), has some distinguishing features, I believe that some of the findings are valuable to public higher education professionals and governance practitioners, as some of the findings will possibly be generalizable to the public higher education context in South Africa. The study was limited to the South African context, which is currently facing unique political and economic circumstances; however, it is believed that the findings remain valid, as the private higher education sector and its governance structures are not directly affected by the recent events. However, the political turmoil will have to be considered as it does provide some insight into the current state of higher education in South Africa. The violent incidents and unrest were mentioned during the interviews, but the participants were probed regarding its impact on the current state of governance.

Another limitation is that the sample of private institutions was drawn from my professional network as researcher, and could potentially be extended, including to other regions in South Africa as it was dominated by institutions with sites of delivery in and around the Gauteng area. Some institutions included were multi-site providers that have campuses across South Africa (see Table 2). This was deemed sufficient to ensure representation of all the regions in South Africa as

the governance structures of the particular institutions include campuses in other regions.

In terms of the theoretical framework, the study has not explored governance from human relations, social cognition, and cultural theory perspectives. The focus was on management- and governance-related theories (Kezar & Eckel, 2004) that are mostly corporate in origin. The study was limited as it did not consider the impact of human dynamics and relationships on governance structures. Neither were matters of gender and culture covered in the interviews. Governance structures as points of connections between individuals were addressed to a certain extent but, as a researcher, I do believe that the scope of study could be extended to consider the state of governance from those perspectives, especially in the South African environment. Personally, I find the human influences in organizational settings interesting, specifically in the higher education environment. Research in South Africa tends to be politically and culturally focused, or, on the other hand, exclusionary due to a fear of political incorrectness. Further studies are required specifically in the field of governance in higher education in order to explore human relations and cultural theoretical perspectives.

5. Areas for further research

In the course of this study, various areas for further research were identified. First, the study could be extended to include a larger sample and, potentially, also public higher education institutions. There are various other research questions related to social cognition, political and cultural theoretical frameworks, and human dynamics which can be formulated. It is clear from the literature that there is a need for further empirical studies of governance, as to date these has been mainly anecdotal (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Goedegebuure and Hayden (2007) also emphasize the need for empirical studies, specifically those relating to the

challenges facing higher education governance as compared to other sectors. A call for qualitative approaches in governance studies is expressed by Brennan and Solomon (2008).

Another area for further research is identified by Locke et al. (2011): the impact of public-private partnerships on governance. The attention given to audit and risk management in governance structures is an area highlighted by Brown (2011). Christopher (2014b) specifically mentions the need to investigate the internal audit function and how it can potentially enhance governance structures. There is thus an absence of research in the areas of internal audit and risk management.

Gender imbalances and the lack of student and academic representation are areas in need for further research (Bank, 2011). According to Sherer and Zakaria (2016), this applies specifically in relation to governance efficiency and its link to gender representation. In the South African context, there is a need for studies relating to the equal representation of various equity groups (Kulati, 2000). Luescher-Mamshela (2010) contends that the role of student representative councils is still not sufficiently researched in the South African context. Research should also be extended to consider the value and contributions made by council members, as well as performance and remuneration (Macheridis, 2016).

It is clear from the above matters that there are a vast number of areas that warrant further research. Bótas and Huisman (2012) support this by indicating that governance practitioners face significant challenges that should be supported by sound, empirical research.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to link the findings to the previously presented literature. As the researcher, I took the opportunity to reflect on the findings and on the

study as a whole, emphasizing the need for institutions to be open to change and to adjust their current governance practices to support reputation-building that will lead to increased credibility. I also reflected on the limitations of the study and areas needing further research. Unfortunately, the study indicates that there is gap between the current and ideal state of governance as experienced by practitioners in private higher education institutions in South Africa. It is my hope that these findings can at least raise awareness of the gaps and areas in need of improvement or development.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusion

The main conclusions of this study relate to the core findings, their implications, the appropriateness of the IPA methodology, and the implications for practitioners. These aspects are outlined in this concluding chapter.

1. Core findings

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of practitioners of the state of governance in private higher education in South Africa. Although there is a clear awareness of the need for change, the evolution of governance has not been significant over the last years. It is, however, recognized that renewed governance frameworks, processes, and procedures can improve perceptions and increase the credibility of private institutions. The findings of this study reveal that governance is not well understood in the private higher education sector in South Africa. They show that there is a gap between the evidence and the practice of governance, as per the experiences of the practitioners working and managing these institutions. The findings also show that the institutions are dominated by corporate governance approaches, which are independent of academic governance. Participants spoke passionately about their institutions, how they aim to create stable and creative environments, and how they experience governance as two ends of a continuum, stretching from very practical, operational governance to high-level board governance, in most cases with a gap in between.

Wilson and Chapman (2013b) highlight that academic governance is often weak in private institutions. Shah and Nair (2012, p. 310) are of the view that private institutions are often family-owned or have individual ownership, which poses a challenge to governance particularly due to 'limited visible accountability'. The private sector in South Africa is, as in other countries, 'highly vulnerable to

reputation damage' (Wilson & Chapman, 2013a, p. 4). It is often unfortunate how bad experiences and negative perceptions and assumptions lead to private institutions being discredited. This leaves private institutions in a continual fight for recognition of quality and standards which can ultimately only be earned through reputation-building and graduates leaving these institutions as employable and quality candidates for jobs.

It was evident that the benefits of good governance are not realized and that it is viewed as an additional layer of bureaucracy or a burden that might impact on efficiency and responsiveness. Board governance practices are, in most cases, exemplary; however, they driven by company legislation and not statutes or the rules of the institution itself. Private higher education institutions are diverse and complex, they are very different in size and in terms of the scope of their offerings, and governance practices are unique though not always suitable to the institutional environment and context. Academic participation is low due to the academic workforce profile. The findings were not unexpected; however, I am most concerned about the lack of academic leadership and governance.

2. Implications of the findings

It is clear that there is a need for more research on the phenomenon of governance, not only in the private sector, but also in the broader higher education landscape as other studies indicate that the findings are not unique to private higher education. There is a need for more discussions and debates to ensure we increase the level of understanding. Even though governance is much more established in the public sector, the effectiveness of historical approaches should be questioned and revised. The findings also reveal that there is a willingness to implement sound governance, and thus we need to provide capacity development opportunities to ensure that, again, there are increased levels of understanding and awareness.

In terms of external or state governance, the findings can potentially inform the work of the regulatory authorities in South Africa and beyond to ensure that quality assurance and accreditation activities are utilized to build capacity and improve understandings of governance. It is also my hope that they can inform national debates and policy development. Another implication can be the establishment of communities of practice, which again can be stretched beyond the border of South Africa. Public universities are forced to focus on additional income streams and attracting government funding is becoming increasingly challenging; hence the need for public institutions to learn about corporate governance practices. I hope that the study will also inform quality assurance and accountability frameworks to encourage sound governance practices in all higher education institutions.

Although the findings are to a large extent context-specific and the study was conducted in a highly sensitive and disruptive higher education environment, I do believe they are transferable to the public sector, as well as to other parts of the world. Political and economic unrest is not confined to South Africa, and I believe that higher education governance in other countries can benefit from the study in order to improve the knowledge and awareness of higher education practitioners and to ensure they are critical of their own practice and experiences.

A number of key themes emerged from the finding which can provide guidance and points of reference for the improvement of governance practices. These can be adjusted or adapted to fit unique contexts and institutional structures. The phenomenon of governance should be present in all higher education institutions; thus the ideal state represented in the conceptual framework would be applicable in informing practices in the broader higher education sector. Shattock's work on higher education governance (2002; 2003; 2004; 2012) provided a theoretical base and conceptual framework for considering current governance practices in

institutions. The framework functioned as the window through which the experiences from the practitioners were considered. The conceptual framework provided a governance model that can be used as a guide to reflect on the current state of governance and to identify areas in need of improvement, ultimately leading to increased institutional success and performance. It can thus serve as guide to good practice so as to measure internal effectiveness and improve the quality of the way we do things.

On an individual level, we should consider the implications of the study on the practitioners themselves; it can be concluded that their roles and responsibilities related to governance should be clearly defined and even incorporated in their performance development plans and objectives. In this manner, these become a focus of what they do and are not experienced as an addition to their day-to-day jobs. They want to learn and do the right thing and demonstrated an eagerness to increase their understanding of governance. I do believe we need to take a step back to ensure that the practitioners are starting from a good base. To me, the fundamental realization is that private institutions need to understand what it means to be a university (Barnett, 2011; Kerr, 1982). It is clear that the participants have an understanding of what it means to be a business (hence the dominant corporate governance approach); this needs to be extended to include elements of sound academic governance.

3. The appropriateness of the IPA methodology

IPA is distinctive and perhaps unfamiliar research method in higher education studies. There is, however, an increase in the number of IPA studies being published and its benefits are being recognized more broadly in a wide range of fields. In conclusion, I feel that the real benefit of using the IPA methodology is in the two-pronged approach of analysis and interpretation. It is, in my view, a suitable method for ensuring that experiences are described, analyzed, and

interpreted. It ensures a real, true, and rich account of the experiences of participants associated with a particular phenomenon, which are then analyzed and interpreted (Finlay, 2014). Tuffour (2017) summarizes it well: in IPA studies, the emphasis is on the convergence and divergence of experiences that are analyzed in detail. IPA also allows a relatively small sample. While this does not always support generalization, but I believe the things to be learnt from this study will have an implication for practitioners in higher education more generally, especially for those who are willing to critique and want to improve governance practices at their institutions by learning from the experiences shared by others. As a researcher, as much as I aimed to bracket my personal perceptions and preconceived ideas, most of these were confirmed by the findings, and my passion for this topic has grown even further. I also experienced first-hand the benefit of the IPA approach and can observe its impact in improving professional practice in higher education based on the accounts of others.

4. Implications for practitioners

It became clear to me that the impact of good governance is underestimated – which is probably a consequence of a lack of understanding. Practitioners need to know why governance is important; this will lead to increased awareness and higher levels of understanding of how sound governance can lead to institutions performing better (Zaman, 2015). The greater need is to understand the links between governance and educational outcomes, as this is where the point of differentiation lies. This is the element that will differentiate one private institution from another.

It can also be concluded that most participants have not witnessed good governance. There is definitely a negative connotation when the topic of governance is raised – it is viewed as involving more work. Innovative governance practices are necessary to ensure that points of engagement are created at which

decisions can be made, documented and all the necessary stakeholders can participate in the discussion, bringing together all the elements and points of view to inform decision-making. Good decisions then ultimately lead to good performance. The points of engagement will subsequently inform policy and ensure continuity.

I believe the findings of the study will contribute to professional practice at the very basic level of creating awareness about the gap between evidence and practices, and about the importance of academic governance in private institutions. Increased demonstrations of sound governance can impact on the credibility and reputation of private higher education institutions. I am optimistic that even the smallest adjustment to current governance practices can lead to substantial change and that good governance will, as a result, become non-negotiable. The greatest personal result for me would be that practitioners at the private institutions sampled find the balance between corporate and academic governance, and that they realize that governance is a strong contributor to high-quality educational outcomes (Zaman, 2015). In this way, the implication is that the practitioners will be able to strengthen their institutions.

The reality is that private institutions will never be able to implement governance structures similar to those of public institutions. The latter are often used as the preferred governance models for universities, and it is clear from the study that this is not feasible for private institutions – hence the need for innovative governance approaches (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Barnett (2011, p. 154) captures this aptly by saying ‘let us dare to imagine new kinds of university’. My journey has come full circle. This study was a result of inspiring work of William G. Tierney (2004) who compared universities to vessels sailing the rough seas. He emphasizes the importance of governance, leadership, and management in navigating our institutions through these rough seas; and we are affected by external conditions but need to retain a sense of purpose whilst navigating the

perfect storm. He concludes that 'neither sailing nor governance is a science' (Tierney, 2004, p. vxi): there is no manual, you have to study the conditions, deal with complexities, and make decisions to change direction. I hope this study will create some awareness that governance is about creating points of connection and engagement, and that private institutions are well-placed to explore new and innovative models to make powerful connections between the corporate and academic worlds.

In any context education means and leads to opportunity, even more so in South Africa. After years of unequal access and of learning to be viewed as a privilege reserved for a select few, higher education is still not transparent and accessible. With opportunity comes responsibility, which cannot be assumed. We owe it to students and to ourselves, as managers and professional practitioners in higher education, to govern and manage places of learning properly to ensure quality outcomes. I certainly take this responsibility very seriously when entrusted with the careers, lives, and futures of vulnerable and fragile students (Norris, 2004). Universities are complex organizations and in South Africa they are situated in a complex environment that amplifies the need for a deep understanding of good, sound governance (Swansson, Mow & Bartos, 2005).

Since I have completed the research, I have presented the findings or parts of the research project at various forums and conferences. These presentations were well received, and I have subsequently been invited to engage with the regulators in both the vocational and higher education sector in Australia regarding staff training and offering professional development opportunities in the field of governance. I have presented the findings at the annual conference of the professional association for private institutions, and this led to further connections with private providers in Australia who wish to improve their governance structures, or invitations to comment and consult on their current governance arrangements and give advice on how this can be enhanced. I was

also invited to be a keynote speaker to a group of government officials in Australia, completing a qualification in governance and management. Even though they were in a different sector, they found the findings useful and the learnings relevant to their course. A further professional engagement with the association for community colleges in Australia arose from the study. It is thus clear, that since the completion of the study there has been numerous opportunities to share the findings and it certainly confirmed my problem statement as relevant to a much wider, international audience, even beyond higher education. The findings could easily be customized for the local environment and professional context within which I'm currently engaging, and it has shown its relevance in both the public and private sectors.

5. The way forward

Coming to the end of this journey makes me feel inspired. I want to talk about governance, I want to discuss it with others and I want to share what I have learnt. I am aware that the study was conducted in a very particular and sensitive environment, but I do believe the findings are generalizable to other institutions and to other countries. I have realized that there are not many optimistic advocates for good governance in higher education. I feel empowered by those who I have learnt from, and I am excited about my own journey to improved governance at every institution I come across, work at, or work with. I am more excited about governance than I have ever been before. This thesis assisted me in refining my thinking and discovering new ideas as I progressed through the different stages.

I also want IPA to become a well-known and regularly used approach to research, as I think its value is underestimated and it is often not considered for this role. I am of the view that it can add significant value to qualitative research, in particular in the fields of education, higher education, and higher education

management. It was not known to me when I started this journey and I have learnt so much about it, which I hope will assist in making it an acceptable and successful method for higher education management research. I became a believer and this is certainly not my last IPA project. I am excited to share my research methodology journey (and not only what I have learnt about governance) with my students and colleagues, which may lead to it gaining traction and becoming more evident in higher education research.

I want to spread the word, create awareness, teach others and I want to help. I want higher education practitioners to take something away from this study, whether is merely identifying the gap between what is documented and the governance practices themselves, or actual ideas about how governance can be improved at their institutions. I trust that it will be useful to practitioners in any context or in any type of institution. I have learnt that governance, especially academic governance, is in some sense universal. In whichever shape or form it is implemented, it should be the cornerstone of any organization claiming to train and educate others. I do believe the biggest contribution will be the conceptual framework for the ideal state of governance, which can serve as a guide to improving governance practices. I am of the view that this can be applied to many institutions around the world.

I have come across passionate governance practitioners in my professional journey. I want the study to break down walls and boundaries about a topic which is often neglected and not discussed nearly enough. Governance is assumed to be in place; I want to create a level of awareness that its presence does not necessarily mean that it is working. I want to share what I have learnt, and hope that others will learn too. I am of the view that this study fills a very small part of a very big hole in South African higher education. I believe that if we can create real and honest points of connection, we can constructively discuss the issues at hand, come to conclusions and make informed decisions. We can hold one another

accountable and in this way enhance professionalism and respect in our institutions.

I believe that this study is a small step in working towards the university of the future (Ernst & Young, 2017). It recognizes that there is no single model or approach to governance that will be acceptable to all. I am anxiously optimistic about getting back to basics, about getting the basics right, and then advancing to more innovative practices.

If this study can inform better governance practice or create a higher level of awareness of governance and increase understanding of this phenomenon for even one institution, then I believe I have achieved my goal. I hope to look back after a few years and be part of many journeys at institutions that have taken on board some ideas on how to improve governance to ensure quality outcomes for our students. Good governance can be a point of differentiation, it can promote staff engagement, and it can encourage student and stakeholder participation. I am searching for examples of 'change-maker universities' (Sullivan, 2013, n.p.) where we can share stories and case studies of how improved governance has improved our institutional success and performance.

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ANNEXURE 1
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <p>Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. As I have explained, the study aims to explore the state of governance at private higher education institutions in South Africa. The interview will last approximately 1 hour today and I will be asking you questions about the governance structures and practices at your institution.</p> <p>Confirmation of completion of consent form? Yes / No</p> <p>Confirmation that you are comfortable with me recording our conversation today? Yes / No</p> <p>Please let me know at any point if you want me to switch off the recording device, or if you wish to state something off the record.</p> <p>Confirmation regarding whether there are any further questions? Yes / No</p>	
<p>Introductory questions</p> <p>Seeking to record a factual description of the relation between your role and governance</p> <p>What is your position at the institution?</p> <p>How does your position relate to governance? What is your involvement in governance at your institution?</p>	
Question 1	<p>What is your definition / understanding of governance?</p> <p><u>Alternative phrasing / probing:</u> How do you define governance?</p>
Question 2	<p>Tell me about governance at your institution.</p> <p><u>Alternative phrasing / probing:</u></p> <p>How would you describe governance at your institution?</p>
Question 3	<p>Can you give an overview of the major / main governance structures at your institution?</p> <p><u>Further probe:</u> Ask about academic board / equivalent, board of directors / equivalent to determine corporate and academic structures.</p>
Question 4	<p>What purpose do governance practices and structures serve at your institution?</p> <p><u>Additional probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think your institution can exist without them? • Do you think their purpose is well understood? • What do you think can improve?
Question 5	<p>Which main topics are addressed by the governance structures?</p> <p><u>Alternative phrasing / probing:</u> Tell me about typical agenda items, items that take up the most time in meetings, topics dominating meetings, etc.</p>

Question 6	In your view, how do governance practices at your institution compare to what is happening at other private higher education institutions?
Question 7	What do you see as the main differences / similarities between governance structures / practices at private and public institutions?
Question 8	<p>Tell me about academic participation in governance structures at your institution.</p> <p>Would you describe the governance structures as representing the different parts of your institutions?</p> <p>Which groups / units / departments are not well represented?</p>
Question 9	<p>How would describe the documentation related to governance at your institution?</p> <p>Can you give examples of governance information, such as documents or artifacts, and how this is made available or distributed at your institution?</p>
Question 10	<p>If you had to rate the responsiveness of the governance structures at your institution, how would you rate it?</p> <p>Do you think it can be more responsive, that decisions can be made more quickly?</p> <p>Do you feel that sufficient time is spent on decisions?</p>
Question 11	If you think beyond your own institution, what do you think are the main challenges or opportunities private higher education institutions face that can be addressed through sound governance?
<p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>Before we conclude the interview, do you have anything that you wish to share, or ideas that came to mind during the interview that I did not ask, or that we did not have the opportunity to discuss?</p> <p><u>Closing comments and invitation to verify transcribed interview data and findings</u></p> <p>I will be transcribing the interview and I will make a copy of the transcript available should you wish to review it. I will also share preliminary findings with you to ensure that you agree that it accurately represents your views and opinions.</p>	

ANNEXURE 2
ETHICAL APPROVAL



Dear Nicolene

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Prof. Morag A. Gray
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Peter Kahn; Dr. Ewan Dow
Date of Approval:	19 th February 2014

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.
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This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analyzed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Morag Gray

Chair, EdD. VPREC

ANNEXURE 3

LETTER OF CONSENT



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET and CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study with the purpose of investigating the state of private higher education in South Africa, specifically in relation to governance. The researcher is inviting the professional staff involved in governance at identified private institutions to be part of the study. This form is part of a process called 'informed consent' to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Nicolene Murdoch, who is a doctoral student at the University of Liverpool. You may already know the researcher as an employee of Monash South Africa, or as an active participant in the national quality assurance landscape. But this study is separate from those roles.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gain an increased understanding of the state of governance in private higher education institutions in South Africa. The private sector is considered necessary by national authorities to ensure increased access is created to higher education. The aim of the research will be to shed some light on the governance practices at private higher education institutions in South Africa, and to determine pockets of excellence and reasons why it is continuously plagued with negative perceptions of low quality. The research project will aim to recognize the increasing role private higher education institutions need to play due to the supply-demand gap and because there is a need for direction and capacity development.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- take part in an audio-recorded interview that will last approximately 1 hour and to share your inputs and suggestions relating to the governance structures at your institution and possible improvements; and how this related to academic credibility;
- release any public documentation or information you have access to regarding the current governance structure to the researcher for analysis.

Here are some sample questions:

Describe your experiences regarding the governance structure implemented at your institution.

Do you have any suggestions or proposals regarding possible improvements?

Identify any areas of concern relating to the decision-making levels and some suggestions you might have.

What are your views regarding the level of authority of the committees?

Do you think the institution is capitalizing on the fact that you have governance structures and mechanisms in place?

Do you have any suggestions relating to the membership of the relevant committees?

Do you think that this contributes to the credibility of decisions made?

You will be provided with an opportunity to verify the information obtained during the interviews. I will provide you with a copy of the transcribed interviews to ensure that your views have been captured accurately. I will also provide you with the findings of the study, once it is completed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision whether or not you choose to participate in the study. You will not be treated differently if you decide not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop participating at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study does not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. Even so, all participants taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study have insurance cover.

This study aims to provide new knowledge that may permit a more streamlined and efficient academic governance structure in your institution and in the sector, and clear decision-making and accountability levels, which will have an impact on the quality of the core business of education, research, and community engagement moving forward. This can ultimately impact on how private provision is perceived and the credibility that will be added through demonstrating sound governance practices.

Should you at any stage feel that your privacy or your institution is at risk of being exposed or affected in a negative way, you will be allowed to exit and inform me as the researcher that you are no longer able to continue. No additional questions or explanations will be required.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for taking part in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. You will not be attached to your institution or a particular institution. Data will be kept secure with password protection by the researcher as part of the archiving processes. As you are aware, the archives are kept in the campus safe. Data will be kept for a period of at 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via + 27 11 950 4207 or nicolene.murdoch@monash.edu . If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the University of Liverpool representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 001-612-312-1210 and her email address is liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

ANNEXURE 4

EXAMPLES OF UNITS OF MEANING AND INITIAL CODES

<u>Units of meaning</u>	<u>Initial codes</u>
we meet at different levels, we have a structure, different committees, we only have one, we all meet together, we meet regularly, we are too small for various committees, I don't know the purpose of this committee, we meet when it is necessary, we have various committees	Frequency of meetings Governance structures Levels of governance
corporate, corporate governance, board of directors, our board, auditing requirement, audit committee, financial matters, financial statements, risks, performance, financial performance, external board members, international participation, our board makes the decisions	Corporate governance Board of directors External stakeholders
academics, lecturers, academic governance, academic committees, meeting with academics, senate, academic board, there are not academic present, academics don't want to be there, they don't like the board meetings, students don't attend our meetings, academic don't attend meetings, academics are not interested in the financial information	Academic governance Academic participation Content of meetings
I don't like the meetings because I'm not prepared, I don't know what to expect, crisis management, reactive, discipline, operational, we meet when necessary, I call meetings when I have to, ad hoc, informal, no minutes, we do minutes for board meetings	Content Purpose of meetings Record keeping

ANNEXURE 5

EARLY CATEGORIES, INITIAL THEMES AND SUPPORTING QUOTES

<u>Supporting quotes</u>	<u>Early categories</u>	<u>Broad initial themes</u>
<p><i>What do you mean by governance? In my understanding governance refers to our committees. We have various committees in our institution, we meet every day sometimes. We have lots of things to meet about and to make sure the institution is running.</i></p> <p><i>Our structures are not really formalised. We have different committees and then we have our board. They are our highest decision-making body. We work towards board meetings and we report them.</i></p> <p><i>To me governance is the government. They oversee funding, they make or break the rules, they rule and order us. They are our governing body. They fund the public, but they don't give us any money.</i></p> <p><i>Our CEO is very corporate in his approach. We have a corporate governance structure. We have the board and some other committees. We organise our institution differently to what I'm used to when I worked at a public institution. Even the names of our committees are not the same. We don't have many academics on these committees because they don't have time.</i></p> <p><i>You can find the terms of reference of our committees documented. We did this for the audit and the programme accreditation visit. You can see what each committee is doing and what they should be doing. They don't always stick to this, as you would know, things happen on a daily basis which impact on this schedule.</i></p>	<p>Governance Government Structures Committees Various committees Corporate governance Academic governance Terms of reference Level State Funding External reporting</p>	<p>Definitions</p>
<p><i>We only prepare financial reports for the Board.</i></p> <p><i>We don't have time for this, we meet when we have to or when something goes wrong. We are quick with our actions and we don't bother academics with the day-to-day operations.</i></p> <p><i>The board meets four times a year. I don't know how regularly the academics meet. I suppose they have their own meetings.</i></p> <p><i>We have weekly executive meetings. The CEO is the chair of this meeting. We do this most weeks and there is a lot to deal with.</i></p> <p><i>Our governance really happens on ad hoc basis. We don't really have formal structures for this, we just see how we go and if there is something to meet about, we meet.</i></p> <p><i>We don't involve the academics on our executive</i></p>	<p>Board of directors Executive Operational reporting Strategic planning Financial reports Accountability Chair Internal structures Membership Frequency of meetings</p>	<p>Structures</p>

<p><i>committee. This is for the operational stuff and strategic matters. They are not members because they don't want to be members.</i></p>		
<p><i>We have an Academic Board. They oversee all academic matters. We don't really attend those meetings as it does not have anything to do with us and the operations.</i></p> <p><i>The academics are not members of the board. They can keep busy with the academic matters and the board oversees the operations and strategies. We only have a few people that attend board meetings. We don't really know what they discuss there.</i></p> <p><i>There are different committees in the different divisions. There are also campus committees. I think we have too many committees and they are duplicating or, how can I say, the one hand does not know what the other hand is doing. They are all meeting the whole day and academics are complaining, as they need to be in class.</i></p> <p><i>We don't have senates like public institutions have.</i></p> <p><i>Our senate is much more informal. Unless you view the board of directors as the senate. I don't really know what senates do or what happens at our meetings. I arrange the meetings but I'm not there.</i></p> <p><i>We don't bother academics with the day-to-day operations.</i></p>	<p>Representation Participation Academic board Senate</p>	<p>Academics</p>
<p><i>We don't have time to do agendas and minutes. We just have to get the job done.</i></p> <p><i>We talk about what is happening at the institution and mostly what is happening with government and the media. We also manage crises. If something happens in the student residences.</i></p> <p><i>The Senate is responsible for academic disciplinary hearings for staff and students.</i></p> <p><i>We do the disciplinary hearings. For students and staff. We do hearings when we need to. We only meet when there is a disciplinary matter on the table.</i></p> <p><i>The terms of reference of the Academic Committee include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Oversight of academic quality matters;</i> <i>• Approval of academic program changes;</i> <i>• Approval of new academic programs.</i> <p><i>We meet about the budget and the student numbers. We need to track how many students we have at the</i></p>	<p>Terms of reference Agenda Disciplinary hearings Crisis management Enrolments Student numbers Retention</p>	<p>Content</p>

<p><i>beginning of each quarter and how many students we need, and how many we lost.</i></p> <p><i>We have to look at the students who are failing. How can we help them? How can we get them back, how can we get them back in courses? We have to make sure we keep the students. We have to count the enrolments and give regular reports on how many students we have.</i></p>		
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Annexure 6

LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBTAINED FROM INSTITUTIONS

<u>Institution</u>	<u>List of documents per institution</u> <u>(both online / hard copies) *</u>
Institution 1	Policy and Governance Terms of Reference: Board of Directors Guidelines for teachers External moderation guidelines Notes of daily meetings Constitution Minutes of Management meetings Minutes of Assessment committee meetings
Institution 2	Directorates and departments Governance standards Terms of Reference Minutes of Academic meeting Minutes of Quality Committee Board and other standard committees Academic policy approval process Academic governance overview Student records policy and procedures
Institution 3	Policy compliance at X: Teaching and learning Academic registrar services: Overview Schedule of meetings Risk Register General governance information sheet External engagement / Community work overview Constitution Assessment committee meeting minutes Minutes of Quality meeting
Institution 4	Corporate Services Constitution and Statute Governance committee calendar Academic Senate Composition Process of programme approvals Guidelines for agent engagement Academic Innovation Committee: Terms of Reference Sales Committee: Terms of Reference Quality Management Committee minutes
Institution 5	Governance Directorate Board meeting procedures Minutes of Board meetings Minutes of Academic meetings Terms of reference of working groups Departments and units Academic Quality procedures

	Teaching and Learning strategy External audit / accreditation guidelines for academic staff Minutes of sponsor meetings Constitution and composition Senior Management meeting minutes Quality Assurance policy
Institution 6	Regulatory Risk Framework Minutes of Operations Meetings Terms of reference Operations Committee Quality assurance at X Corporate governance at X Course approval at X Community work framework Board meeting minutes Graduation Committee minutes
Institution 7	Terms and definitions Minutes of daily meetings Accreditation framework Organisational structure Academic Excellence Framework Teaching Committee minutes Guidelines for external senate members Examination Committee meeting minutes Community Engagement framework Career Advisory Committees minutes
Institution 8	Teaching and Learning policy and procedures Program approval policy and procedures External engagement guidelines Faculty Committees: Terms of Reference Online Quality Committee: Terms of Reference Minutes of management meetings Faculty onboarding manual Board meeting minutes Endorsements Sales and Marketing Committee minutes
Institution 9	List of standing committees Minutes of Academic Board meetings Minutes of Faculty meetings Governance policy Programme approval process Constitution Implication of Company Law briefing paper
Institution 10	List of affiliations Institutional structure and committees Terms of reference: Teaching Committee Governance procedures and committees

	Advisory Committees: Terms of Reference Placement partner engagement Selection Committee minutes Information security policy Privacy of information policy
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*Some of the titles of documents have been changes to ensure institutions remain anonymous.